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THE TRAGEDY  
OF  
THE CRATER

HENRY PLEASANTS, JR.

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# The Tragedy of the Crater

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BY

HENRY PLEASANTS, JR.

Author of, "Thomas Mason, Adventurer", "Four Great  
Artists of Chester County", "Three Scientists of  
Chester County", "Anthony Wayne", etc.

No single episode in the War Between the States—let us use that term out of respect to our brethren of the South—was more of a real tragedy than the explosion of the famous Petersburg Mine, and the subsequent Battle of the Crater, on July 30, 1864. Every competent analyst of military history will probably agree that had the daring exploit of the miners of the 48th. Regiment, Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteers been followed up in accordance with the plans approved by General Ambrose W. Burnside, commanding the 9th. Corps, the key position of the Confederate defenses of Richmond would have fallen into the hands of the Union Army. Had such occurred, the great war must have ended within a short time. The tale of the fiasco is an essential contribution to our national archives, for it carries a grim lesson that should be learned by every thoughtful citizen.

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THE CHRISTOPHER PUBLISHING HOUSE, BOSTON



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During the World War, the author, then a major on the staff of the Chief Surgeon, Advance Section, A.E.F., had occasion to explore the craters and tunnels on "Dead Man's Hill", near Varennes, France, where some of the most important mining, countermining and military blasting had taken place on the Hindenburg Line. In discussion of the subject of military mining with the engineer officers, he was told that few, if any, of the mining operations on the Western Front had equalled the exploit of the 48th. Pennsylvania miners. As his cousin, then Lieutenant Colonel, had commanded this regiment in the Union attack on Petersburg, and had also commanded the brigade of which the 48th. was a unit during the mining operations, his interest was stirred to seek out all of the available information on the subject, and to place this in such accurate and dispassionate form that it might be readily understood by the average citizen as well as by students of military history.

In the preparation for the dedication of the Petersburg National Military Park, in 1937, much of the manuscript material which he had prepared was borrowed by the U. S. Government authorities in planning the pageant held on April 30th. of that year. This pageant, under the extraordinarily efficient management of Dr. J. Walter Coleman and his staff proved to be one of the most successful as well as impressive re-enactments of a major military engagement ever held. The book as it is now presented to the public has stood the test of painstaking checking and re-checking not only by competent analysts of the present day, but also by those best able to fully understand the Confederate view-point as well as the Union.

The author states that he was so deeply impressed with the sincere and whole-hearted generosity of the present-day southern sympathizers in giving him every assistance

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in his work that he determined to present the full story of the Confederate defense of Petersburg in justice to those lads, some, mere stripling students of the Virginia Military Institute, whose magnificent countercharge against the overwhelming hordes of the Federal troops should rank with the famous exploits of Leonidas at Thermopylae.

Dr. Pleasants was born May 23, 1884, at Radnor, Pa. He was educated at Haverford School; Haverford College; and The University of Pennsylvania. He is a practicing physician, and Fellow of the American College of Physicians. In 1916, he edited "*Memoirs of a Physician*"; by Vikenty Verresayev. (Knopf). In 1934, his first biographical novel, "*Thomas Mason, Adventurer*", (Winston) won the recommendation of the Book of the Month Club. In 1936, he published three historical monographs "*Four Great Artists of Chester County*", "*Three Scientists of Chester County*" and "*Anthony Wayne*", (Temple). For three years, he was Associate Editor of *The Medical World*. From 1925 to 1928, he was Chairman of the Medical Aid Committee, Department of Pennsylvania, American Legion. He is married and has six children.

The Pleasants family in America traces its descent from John Pleasants, who settled at Curles Neck, on the James River, Virginia, in 1668. The father of the author, Henry Pleasants, Esq., was the author of several well-known historical books and monographs.

This is a "Source" book of exceptional value, that should not be missing from any library of consequence, public or private. It is a record of the past that is still close to all of us, and Dr. Pleasants has opened this vast storehouse of facts, presenting them with such clarity and vigor that the drama seems to be the latest March of Time, today, for, as the author says in his Foreword:

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# A Record of the Past that is Still Close to all of Us

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"There is a lesson to be drawn from this tale, which cannot fail to win the approbation of even the most ardent pacifist. It is the lesson of the horror of war. We feel that the true story of an important incident in American military history may be of definite value not as an exaltation of the glory of organized bloodshed; neither with the view of belittling the accomplishments of brave men, nor endeavoring to establish the right or wrong of either side in the great contest, but rather as an object lesson of the almost inevitable futility of war as a means of solving great social and economic problems of the world. We hope that by giving the details of the heroism of both sides, together with an intimate picture of the psychological factors upon which frightful blunders depended, we may be better able to form our judgment in the future as to whether or not an understanding and a suitable adjustment of difficulties can be reached by some method other than sacrifice of valuable human lives."

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# Dr. Henry Pleasants Writes Book on Petersburg Exploit

*June 15, 1935*

Seventy-four years is a long while for a county to have to wait for a book.

There must be few counties, other than Schuylkill, which would have awaited so patiently an integrated account of its most famous military exploit.

The Petersburg Mine has been included in many other books, has appeared in pamphlets, in the Government's accounts of the Court martial following the explosion's failure of purpose, and in regimental histories. It has been given on the radio, and even been re-enacted on the battlefield itself last summer, and yet the Pottsville Library lacked so much as one book upon General Pleasants, his miners and their Creator, which could be given to the popular reader.

Three generations of boys have grown up in Pottsville and have had no volume which could be put in their hands. Had it not been for the 48th Regiment re-unions and the newspaper accounts of the story told as each July rolls around, or for an occasional mention of the story in a history class, this would already have been an unknown tale to the newcomer and the younger generation.

This locality, and students of the Civil War period, can now congratulate themselves upon a book just published, "The Tragedy of the Crater," a labor of love and learning by Dr. Henry Pleasants of West Chester.

From widely scattered sources, from family records, from military critics, and from official documents, the author has collected his materials.

Some of them were gathered here in Pottsville, from old newspapers and old residents of the town, but instead of a book heavy with controversy and foot-notes, it is as readable as a novel and marches to as dramatic a conclusion.

Dr. Pleasants has chosen, after years of study of the battle and General Pleasants' part in it, to tell the whole incident as though it were autobiographical. He has done this, however, with such historical restraint and modesty of re-telling that no one will be offended by it. The curse of the "I book" as the boys call it, is off, and a new hero will be added to the local youngsters' collection—even though the book is written for adults.

The local book shops will now have another book to sell to the tourist, along with Korson's Songs and Ballads (now practically out of print) and with Coleman's Molly Maguire Riots.

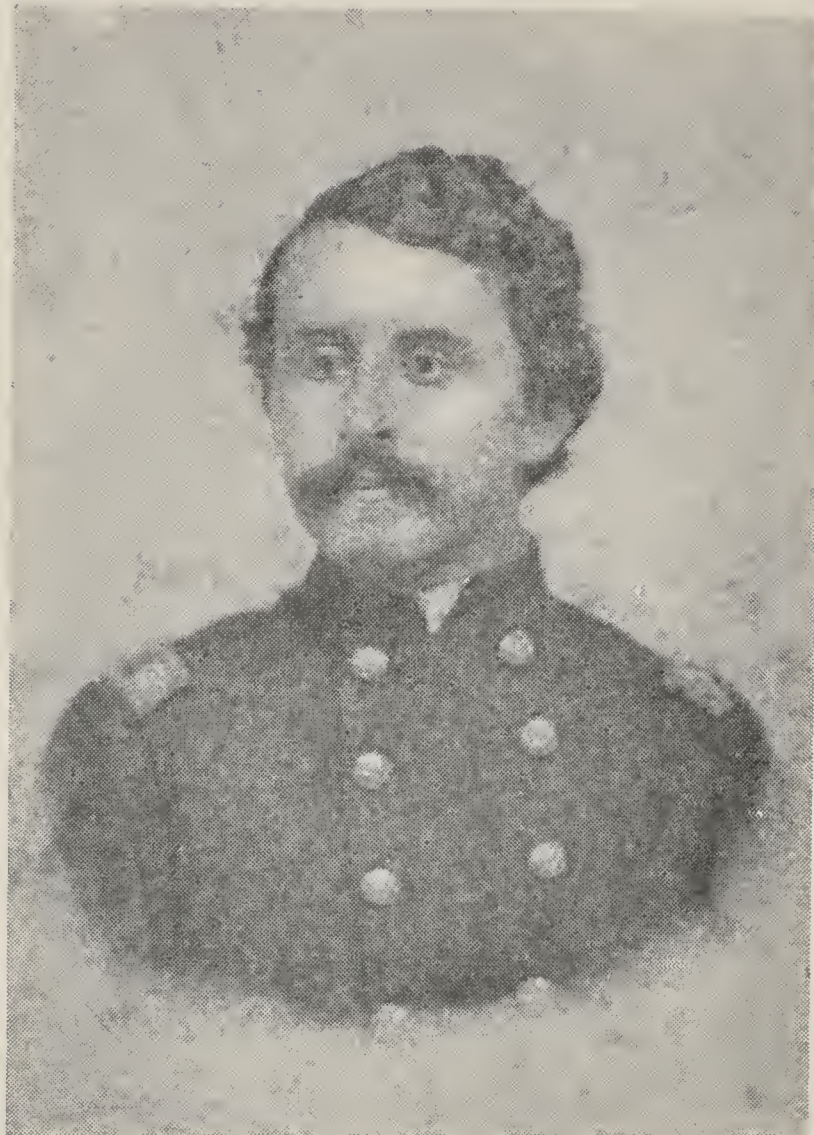
Speaking of Coleman, it is rather a coincidence that that author is now in charge of the Petersburg Battle Field National Park. *Causey*

Dr. Pleasants is a nephew of the General and spoke here only a year ago at the 48th's annual re-union.





# THE TRAGEDY OF THE CRATER



Photograph of  
LIEUTENANT COLONEL HENRY PLEASANTS  
Taken in Lexington Ky. while Provost  
Marshal, 1863

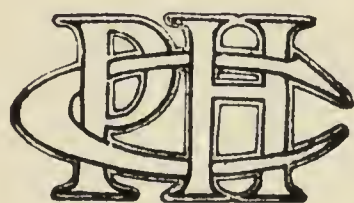


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HENRY PLEASANTS, JR.



The Christopher Publishing House  
Boston, U. S. A.

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TO  
EMMA PLEASANTS DEVLIN  
*Whose kindness to a boy  
has never been forgotten.*

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## FOREWORD.

It has been one of the great privileges of my life to have attended the seventy-fifth Reunion of the 48th. Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteer Regiment, at Pottsville, Pennsylvania. A single survivor of the War Between the States, Corporal W. H. Horn, of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, was with us on this occasion. There may be no more reunions; but the story of the great exploit of the 48th. will never be forgotten so long as the line of their descendants exists.

The spirit of my cousin is really telling his version of the exploit, for it was from the notes, documents, letters and current newspaper accounts left by General Pleasants on his death that the tale has been pieced together by the author. Perhaps the fleeting spirit of the leader of the 48th. Regiment has been caught from those who heard him speak during his lifetime; those who knew what mental anguish he suffered because of the failure of the project in the very moment of its actual accomplishment.

The author takes this opportunity of expressing his grateful appreciation of, and thanks for, the invaluable assistance rendered by Miss Edith Patterson, Librarian of the Pottsville Free Library; Mr. W. S. Phillips, formerly Curator of the Crater Museum at Petersburg, Virginia; Captain Carter R. Bishop, of the A. P. Hill Camp of Confederate Veterans, of Petersburg, Virginia; Edward E. Hastings, Esq., of Fryeburg, Maine, who placed at

the disposal of the author his entire library of reference books, and the services of his efficient secretary, Mrs. Ruth E. Felton. Especially important were the personal letters and documents so generously furnished by the daughter of General Pleasants, Mrs. Emma Pleasants Devlin, of San Francisco, California.

It is necessary to state frankly that much of the data relative to the campaigns of the 48th. Regiment was obtained from "The 48th. in the War", by Major Oliver Christian Bosbyshell, and "The Story of the 48th", by Joseph Gould. Major Bosbyshell stated, however, in his book that much of the information used by him had been contributed by General Pleasants himself.

There is a lesson to be drawn from this tale, which cannot fail to win the approbation of even the most ardent pacifist. It is the lesson of the horror of war. We feel that the true story of an important incident in American military history may be of definite value not as an exaltation of the glory of organized bloodshed; neither with the view of belittling the accomplishments of brave men, nor endeavoring to establish the right or wrong of either side in the great contest, but rather as an object lesson of the almost inevitable futility of war as a means of solving great social and economic problems of the world. We hope that by giving the details of the heroism of both sides, together with an intimate picture of the psychological factors upon which frightful blunders depended, we may be better able to form our judgment in the future as to whether or not an under-



standing and a suitable adjustment of difficulties can be reached by some method other than sacrifice of valuable human lives.

*The Author.*



## PREFATORY NOTE

For more than a quarter of a century I have been greatly interested in the history of the warfare around Petersburg, Virginia, which occurred during General Grant's long siege of that city. On many occasions I have roamed over these battle-fields and explored such mines and tunnels as have been made accessible. At such times it has been my rare privilege to have the fortifications and general plans of battle ably explained to me by seasoned veterans of one, or both, of the opposing armies, who not only participated in that campaign, but have made almost a lifetime study of what took place there.

Always of particular interest has been the great mining exploit of the Forty-eighth Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment, under command of Colonel Henry Pleasants, and the so-called "Battle of the Crater," which its successful accomplishment set in motion.

It has been said that "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil." However that may be, it is certain that the perspective of years is needed to arrive at a proper evaluation of men, their visions and accomplishments, and the conditions, favorable or otherwise, under which they labor. Many men who participated in the great conflict of the 'sixties were at the time not justly appraised by their contemporaries. Some leaders whose exploits were then considered quite outstanding are now regarded as having been



much over-rated, while others who received no fitting recognition may now be accorded their merited applause. In this latter class, it appears to me, was this hitherto unparalleled mining accomplishment of Colonel Pleasants and his loyal command.

In "The Tragedy of the Crater" Dr. Henry Pleasants has given us a most valuable first hand narrative of the whole episode. He has not only made a long and thorough study of the subject, but had the inestimable advantage of close family contacts and access to intimate and carefully preserved letters and military records of General Pleasants (the former Colonel) himself.

I regard this unique and very readable story by Dr. Pleasants as an important contribution to historical fact that is indispensable to a thorough understanding of this great military achievement and of certain conditions obtaining during this campaign in the Old Dominion.

*C. Wesley Hale*

Springfield, Mass.,  
March 25, 1938.

# The Tragedy of the Crater

## I

To understand this tale, you must forget that I am no longer living. If I were, I would be one hundred and five years old, for I was born on the sixteenth of February in the year eighteen hundred and thirty three. During my lifetime, I told this tale many times; not as connectedly as now, but disjointedly, between puffs of a pipe or cigar, in the cosy parlor at Rockland, with Uncle Henry in his "Maryland Chair" across from me in front of the open fire, and Aunt Emily in her rocker on the other side of the big center table, on which stood the coal-oil lamp. I think I could tell this tale better now if I were sitting there again, watching the face of the dear old gentleman, as his big eyes flashed lightning, and the vein of his forehead swelled with excitement and anger at my story of how my boys of the 48th. exploded the mine under the Confederate fort that alone barred the advance of the Union forces into the city of Petersburg, Virginia, on the 30th. of July, 1864.

It was not so much the tale of the thrilling experiences that led up to the mine explosion that made Uncle Henry's eyes flash as they did. It was not so much the dramatic story of rough coal miners two at a time, burrowing like woodchucks under tons of

heavy marl clay, with the whole earth around them trembling with the concussion of shell fire that made Aunt Emily lay down her knitting and stare at me with that strange look of horror on her saintly face. It was not the picture I drew of the catastrophe that followed the successful explosion of the mine that brought Uncle James out of his corner with his ear trumpet in his hand and his Paisley shawl hanging from one shoulder to crowd in close to me. Rather, it was the deeper realization on the part of all of us that the sacrifice of precious human lives, thousands of them, had been rendered utterly useless, even in the moment of the successful accomplishment of the most difficult and hazardous military achievement imaginable, because of individual personal jealousy; bungling incompetence; deliberate lack of cooperation, and, finally, rank cowardice.

It was only at Rockland that I could tell all. There, I was sure of the sort of sympathy a young man needs, when his heart is very full of bitterness. Even the great oil portrait by Bass Otis of Uncle Thomas, that hung above the fireplace seemed to look down on me with understanding. Uncle Thomas had been one of the oldest of Uncle Henry's brothers and sisters; and he, too, had known some of the bitterness of military life, during the War of 1812. If my own father had been living, he would have understood my feeling even better than Uncle Henry and Aunt Emily, for he would have realized that my beautiful South American mother had transmitted to me some of the proud, sensitive feelings of a long line of aristocratic Spanish ancestors, to whom petty jealousy and meanness was utterly despicable. He would have understood, too, the fervor with



which I had thrown myself into the cause of the preservation of the Union, for he himself had been an adventurous gun-smuggler to the Spanish dons in Buenos Aires, who had fought for so many years not only to throw off the harsh yoke of Spanish rulers, but also to prevent the even harsher dictatorship of Rozas.

It would seem that I had been born to a life of adventure. On his death-bed, my father had requested my beautiful mother to send me, then but eight years old, up to Philadelphia, to be taken into the family of his favorite brother, Henry, after whom I had been named. Father had realized how critical was the situation in South America at that time; he knew that it was probable that my grandfather, Don Naveis, would lose all of his vast estates. My mother made the sacrifice her dying husband had asked for, although no one will ever know what it cost her. I made the trip, alone, in the care of the captain of the sailing vessel, and arrived safely in Philadelphia, speaking not a word of English. Uncle Henry was a busy practicing physician at that time; and he and Aunt Emily practically adopted me as their son. I was educated at the Central High School, in Philadelphia; and, as soon as I graduated, I took up civil engineering as my profession. At first, I took a position with the Pennsylvania Railroad, which was then just extending its line from Greensburg to Pittsburg. Next, I became a subordinate engineer in the work of running the famous "Sand Patch Tunnel", on the Pittsburgh and Connelsville Railroad. In this work, I learned the first principles of tunnel ventilation, which stood me in good stead later on. From rail-

road work I branched off into mining, as there developed a wonderful opportunity in the anthracite fields.

Now came the happiest days I have ever known. In Pottsville, where I started in on my independent career, were many fine young professional men, who had come out from the city to develop the new industry upon which the growth of commerce was to depend. We had wonderful times together; and it was just about this time that I met Sallie Bannon, and we fell in love with each other. I was doing so well that there was no reason for delaying our wedding. For a few short months, nothing could have been more ideal than our married life; then the crash came. Sallie was taken from me by a sudden illness; and I nearly followed her in the extremity of my grief.

It was just at that period of my deepest sorrow that the great War between the States broke out. I offered my services, at the suggestion, strangely enough, of my mild and saintly Aunt Emily, who evidently thought that the military life would, in a measure give me something of an outlet for my grief. Frankly, I went into the army with the avowed purpose of losing my life in a noble cause. My men, somehow, seemed to have caught my own reckless spirit, for they followed me into some of the most desperately dangerous situations imaginable. They grew to love me as few men love an individual; and I loved those rough miners with all the fervor of my Latin blood—more so, probably, because they represented my one bond with the happy period of my former life.

In this tale that I am about to tell, there is little



need for me to review all of the experiences of the 48th. Regiment in the War. To do so in detail would be tiresome in many respects, even though those very experiences had a very definite bearing upon the greatest of our achievements, that culminated on July 30, 1864 in the explosion of the mine before Petersburg. It is necessary, however, to touch upon certain incidents of our campaign in order to bring out more clearly the underlying causes of the calamitous failure of our exploit to open the way to Petersburg, and end the war then and there.

The 48th. was a unit of the Ninth Corps, commanded by bluff old General Ambrose W. Burnside, concerning whose leadership so many storms of controversy have raged for seventy-five years. Our regiment had first established a post on the storm-racked sand dunes of Hatteras Inlet during the winter of '61-'62; but it was not until March of '62 that we saw active fighting under Burnside at New Bern, North Carolina. After that, came a succession of fierce engagements: the Second Bull Run battle; Chantilly, and South Mountain; then, the great affair at Antietam, when the Ninth Corps made Burnside's name immortal with the capture of the bridge, and the rout of the Confederates on the heights beyond. Then it was that we began to understand the bitter hatred on the part of certain other leaders against our corps commander. We learned that reinforcements had been refused at a time when not only were some fifteen thousand troops instantly available, but also at the very time when the rushing of those troops to Burnside's assistance might have meant the capture of Lee's whole army. It seemed that President Abraham Lincoln under-



stood what had happened; understood in that quiet way of his, for, soon after that, Burnside was made the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Potomac.

That was the beginning of the trouble that was to grow like a cancer, and sap the very life-blood out of the morale of the Ninth Corps towards the end of the War. Fredericksburg became the shambles it did largely because of the refusal of certain leaders to cooperate with poor old Burnside. Our own regiment saw the deliberate delay of Franklin's Corps in bringing up the needed support at the most critical moment in the attack on Marye's Heights. It was so easy for an unwilling leader to misunderstand orders, if they did not meet with his approval; it was so easy to throw the blame for fatal errors upon the shoulders of one who was too honest and sincere to suspect disloyalty and intrigue in others, that in the uproar that followed the fiasco of the Union attack, Burnside was relieved of his command, and sent into the western theatre of the war. He had accepted his fate without carping at his critics; but he had made one request to President Lincoln before he took over the command of the Army of the Ohio, and that was that he be permitted to take with him his beloved Ninth Corps. The request was granted, for it has always been my own opinion that Lincoln had understood all; and that he had removed Burnside merely because he well knew that no officer could function efficiently without loyal cooperation on the part of his subordinates.

It had been expected that Burnside and his troops would be lost in oblivion in the west. Strangely enough, the reverse occurred. First of all, the

record that our regiments made in acting as provost guards in the large cities of Kentucky was so satisfactory to the citizens of those cities that the Union sentiment became strong enough to hold Kentucky from secession. In Lexington, where the 48th. was stationed, I was appointed Provost Marshal, and the citizens actually petitioned for our recall, after the orders had been issued for us to rejoin Burnside in Tennessee. It was in Lexington that I met Anne Shaw, although she was only sixteen years old at the time, a big, beautiful and radiantly joyous girl, who, for the first time since the death of my darling Sallie, made me feel that, perhaps, life was worth living. However, that is not part of my tale now. We left Kentucky, and joined old Burnside just in time to strengthen the defenses of Knoxville. After two active engagements at Blue Springs and Campbell's Station, Burnside was able to save Knoxville, and change the whole aspect of the war in the western theatre by clinching the success of Grant at Vicksburg in so doing.

The significance of Burnside's success in Tennessee was, for a long time, lost upon the authorities at Washington. Our Ninth Corps was forced to spend the winter in the mountains of East Tennessee; a winter so bitterly cold that many of our men died. The 48th. bivouacked at Blaine's Cross Roads, with our main sources of supplies nearly two hundred miles distant. When one thinks of Tennessee, he is reminded of sunny cottonfields, and balmy moonlit skies; but he forgets that in the mountain districts the thermometer may drop in winter almost as low as it does in western Pennsylvania. Remember, too, that those rugged hillsides produce the most meagre



of crops, and practically no hay. Settlements are few and far between; and the poverty of the inhabitants has been too well described to deserve comment. Now, place in such a barren wilderness in mid-winter, some eight thousand hungry soldiers, and a generous quota of lean horses and mules, and you will have an adequate picture of our condition. The daily ration consisted of two ears of corn, and eight ounces of flour. At rare intervals, a foraging party might return with a few half-starved cattle, to be slaughtered for a little fresh, but stringy meat. Shoes wore out rapidly, and could not be replaced. Some of the men made rawhide moccasins from the hides of the slaughtered animals, but many of the less fortunate hobbled around in bare feet. The tents provided little protection against the rain and snow, so most of the men managed to construct log huts, covered with boughs to keep them from freezing. Soap was absolutely unobtainable; and the only lavatory was the nearest mountain stream. Few people can realize that human beings have the persistence and patience to exist under such conditions but our boys did so without complaining. Would they have done these things for any other leader than old Burnside?

One would suppose that under such conditions as I have just described, any suggestion as to reenlistment would be met with never-ending ridicule. But, astounding as it may seem, it was at this same Blaine's Cross Roads, in the dead of winter, that the 48th. enrolled 316 men for another term of the hardships of war. Every regiment that filled a quota of three fourths reenlistment was entitled to one month of veteran furlough, dating from its



arrival in Cincinnati. The 48th. was the first regiment in the corps to be re-mustered; and the second to start on its homeward march of two hundred miles to Camp Hickman, Kentucky. Is it any wonder that, when Grant was finally brought east to command the whole army, the thick heads in Washington came to realize that there was another leader also in the west, who deserved recognition as well? When the furlough was over, Burnside and our Ninth Corps were again where the fighting was heaviest, beginning at the Wilderness, on May 6th., 1864.

The story of our sweep through Virginia includes the fights at Spottsylvania Court House; North Anna River Crossing; Armstrong Farm; Shady Grove Church and Cold Harbor. Grant was doing what was expected of him; and Burnside was contributing his share to the glory of the Army of the Potomac, even though in the capacity of a subordinate in the organization which he had formerly commanded. Eyes were watching his success, however; eyes which were none too friendly. Meade was commanding the Army of the Potomac now; Meade, whose success at Gettysburg was clouded by something which had never been fully explained. It was none too pleasing to the regular army major general that the unheard-of upstart, Grant, was now his superior—and winning battles; still less pleasing was the realization that the man he had supplanted had not only staged a remarkable recovery of his prestige and popularity with his troops, but also was winning recognition in the eyes of the North. The fiasco of Fredericksburg was, somehow, being forgotten.

Suddenly, the wily Grant upset the calculations of the Confederates. Instead of continuing to hammer at the doors of Richmond to no avail, he swept the Army of the Potomac across the Peninsula, brushing aside what little opposition Lee offered; crossed the James River at City Point, and threw his whole offense against Petersburg. In this mad dash, the Ninth Corps headed the attack, after Butler's negro troops had paved the way by their daring assault on the outer fortifications. Promptly, the surprised Confederates withdrew their lines, and telegraphed for reinforcements. For a few days it actually seemed as if we might be able to push on into the city; but the inner defenses, located most firmly at Blandford Cemetery, held out doggedly against our direct attacks.

The part that the 48th. played at this period is so germane to the tale that I am about to tell that I shall give a brief account of it: In the sweep across the Peninsula, we left Tunstall Station after dark, on June 12th., and, about noon next day, arrived within a mile of the Chickahominy River. On the 14th., we crossed this, and advanced against little or no resistance to within three miles of the pontoon bridge over the James River. On the 16th., we crossed this bridge, and set out for Petersburg, passing the advanced works on the City Point Road, where we saw the dead bodies of Butler's negro troops, who had assaulted this position so successfully. Whatever misgivings some may have had as to the ability of the negro troops to fight, it was evident here that, under competent white leadership, such troops were as brave as any. It would have



been well if General Meade had taken cognizance of this fact later on.

We reached the first point in the outer line of the enemy works about 5 P.M., just in time to witness the assault by Barlow's Division of the Second Corps, together with the Second Brigade of the Second Division of the Ninth Corps, which had been sent in support of Barlow by General Potter. The Confederates were desperate now, and the assault failed of its mission. We were exhausted after our long march from the James River, and my men hoped for some rest, but the imperative demand was for the capture of Petersburg. I was, therefore, as commanding officer of the 48th., instructed to be ready for another attack. To this end, I formed my regiment in line of battle.

It was growing dark now. There was a small fort in front of us that bristled with cannon. Occasionally, there would be a sputter of musket fire in our direction, so I ordered my men to lie down, and get as much under cover as possible, while I examined the terrain in front of us. There was a little gully, about fifty yards to the right, through which ran a small stream of water. I saw that the undergrowth on its banks would provide some protection during our advance. The line of the gully ran somewhat to the right of the enemy fort; but I saw that by following this we could slip unnoticed almost under the ramparts, and lie hidden until the proper time arrived. I ordered my men to follow me; and we sneaked down the declivity into the water of the creek, and proceeded downward until an abandoned part of the enemy's original works was reached. It was now so dark that no

observations could be made, so I let my men lie down where they were, sending Companies B. and G. forward to reconnoitre in the darkness, and act as skirmishers against a possible surprise attack. In their eagerness to carry out my orders, they actually crept up to the main fortifications, and received a volley of musketry. Two of the men, Sergeant Wren, and a private from Company B., found themselves too far within the enemy lines, and were taken prisoners—much to my disgust.

The thing that now worried me most was the safety of the colors. They had been given to us by the citizens of Pottsville, during our furlough, and we prized them more highly than our own lives. For downright sentiment, there is no one equal to the average coal miner; and the tougher the man, the deeper his sentiment. I knew this well. The attack I had planned would take place in the dark; and it was highly probable that the color bearer might be taken prisoner, or killed. I therefore detailed extra men as a color guard, and cautioned them to be everlastingly careful to avoid capture. They knew what I meant.

Taking into consideration the likelihood of the enemy having relaxed their vigilance, at three o'clock in the morning I determined to make the attack. After assembling the men in the darkness of the gully, I explained in almost a whisper that the danger ahead was so great that any man in the regiment had my full permission to remain behind. Not a man moved to accept my offer. Bayonets were then silently fixed, and, on my order, all caps were removed from the rifles. I remembered that the British attack on the Americans at Paoli, during the



Revolution had been successful largely because General Gray had insisted upon the removal of the flints from the muskets of the Light Infantry. A single shot from one of our men might spoil all of our plans.

I led the regiment over the creek, and formed a battle line as best I could, although it was impossible to distinguish a man from his neighbor. We advanced for about one hundred yards at a slow walk; and I knew that we must be within a stone's throw of the fort. "CHARGE!", I yelled, and we went up the hill like rabbits, clawing at underbrush to keep our footing; on until we felt the soft earth of the breastworks under our feet. Now, the defenders opened up on us with a vivid flash of muskets right in our faces; but, with a yell, we were over the ramparts, and into the demoralized and astonished mob that was milling around the enclosure like cornered cattle. It was all over in a few moments. "Quarter!" yelled someone, and we stood where we were, while in the half-light of approaching dawn, the enemy officers quietly ordered their men into some sort of formation. To our utter astonishment and delight, we found that the total number of our prisoners was more than that of our own regiment. Better still, we had recaptured the colors of the 7th. New York Heavy Artillery. Two Confederate flags and two pieces of artillery were also part of our booty.

Dawn was approaching rapidly now; and we discovered a redan, or smaller fort, directly south of us, that had its guns trained on our newly captured position. I saw at once that our position would be untenable unless that redan were taken. I formed

my men hastily, and gave the order to charge. Over the works we went at top speed, the boys firing as they ran. I flew into a rage because they got completely out of hand in their wild rush; but they accomplished their purpose, for they swept into that redan like a torrent. Out at the rear, fled the Confederates toward Petersburg, leaving their guns where they were. Some of our boys tried to fire on the fleeing groups with these guns, but the enemy had taken the precaution of withdrawing the charges. In the excitement, we almost overlooked a dozen Confederate soldiers, hiding under a gun platform. These surrendered, and were marched to the rear, while we assembled our forces and made quick preparations to hold the two positions as part of the Union lines. In this we were successful; and the capture of these two forts that morning was later the determining factor of the great project of our regiment, the Petersburg Mine.

The purpose of giving the details of our daring attack on the Confederate position is to show how vitally important to the Union cause was speed in the advance toward the heights of Blandford Cemetery. Burnside had given us to understand this; and we had accomplished even more than had been expected of us. When it is recalled that our regiment made that attack after several days of hard marching, it is abundantly evident that there must have been a vitally stimulating force in our corps commander, else the project would never have been undertaken. I wish to make clear, also, that the success of the Ninth Corps in its swift advance brought honest old Burnside more than ever into the limelight of public recognition as a daring leader

of troops. What follows in the course of my narrative will have its only explanation in the mind of the intelligent reader. Perhaps, the lesson drawn from this may be sufficiently far-reaching that it will not be lost upon those in authority, to whom may be intrusted the choice of leadership in a national emergency.



## II

The campaign of the Union forces during the siege of Petersburg is perhaps less understood and appreciated than most of the major operations of the Civil War. To some degree this is due to the fact that the conquered army is seldom accorded the credit due for even an extraordinary piece of military achievement. At the close of the Civil War, interest was centered only upon those operations which had redounded to the credit of the northern generals, who eventually were numbered with the victorious. Petersburg was eventually taken by Grant; and his dogged determination to apply a carefully organized, comprehensive campaign of slowly moving but irresistible force of numbers against heroic bravery and skilful leadership was finally justified. It is not my purpose to criticize the slow moving but clear-headed commander of the Northern Army. He had been chosen because of the very qualities which he exhibited in the Petersburg campaign. They were safe qualities. He was not considered brilliant by his associates, but he won battles.

There are, however, lessons to be learned in every war, campaign, battle, or skirmish. Human beings are never perfect; and it is the human element, with its weaknesses, lapses of intelligence, and its personal idiosyncrasies that often determines success or failure in a critical situation. The history of war is studied with the view to the minimizing of the number of failures due to weakness of the human element;

and it is with this thought in my mind that I am endeavoring to present actual facts rather than mere personal opinion, in order that the lessons may be set forth in a clear and understandable form. Yes, Petersburg was taken—but on the third of April in the year 1865, just ten months and fourteen days after our regiment made their memorable night attack on the fort and redan, thus establishing their position in the Union lines at the point nearest the Confederate defense and the limits of the city itself. Back of the enemy line opposite the salient occupied by the Ninth Corps, lay the Blandford Cemetery, on a commanding elevation of ground, beyond which the spires of churches in the center of the city appeared on the horizon line. To even a casual observer, it was apparent that the key point of the defense of the city was this hill on which the cemetery was located. Naturally enough, the Confederate leaders knew this too well, and their line of fortifications in front of us was practically impregnable as far as direct assault was concerned. Other Union forces, which had preceded us in the advance, had been phenomenally successful in driving the Confederate's out of one of the most strongly fortified positions nearest the Appomatox River, east of the city, and this point established the eastern limit of our operations, besides being later the base of railroad artillery bombardment.

Our Union line became firmly established all the way from the Appomatox River to our Ninth Corps salient within a day or two of our capture of the fort and redan. From this point southward and westward our line ran somewhat irregularly, and the distance between it and the Confederate fortifica-



tions increased with the distance from the center of the city. It was obvious from this that any quick assault upon the enemy position to be of tactical importance must penetrate the heavily fortified line and carry Cemetery Hill. The worst menace to any plans we might make was a solidly constructed earthworks on an elevation of ground 400 yards south of where we now stood. From prisoners and other sources of information we learned that this fort was manned by a battery under Pegram, and that the troops in support of it were the best of the Confederate infantry, under Elliott. The battery in this fort was well able to enfilade any attacking forces to the east or west, and any direct assault upon it was utterly foolhardy, for it commanded a rather steep open hill running down to our own lines. That fort was, therefore, the one great obstacle in our path to Cemetery Ridge.

When daylight of June 17th. came, we found ourselves well entrenched and able to take some account of our losses. We made desperate efforts that day to advance as far as possible; and on the 18th, were able to drive the enemy back across a railroad gully and succeeded in establishing our line within a hundred yards of the Confederates. Colonel, later General, Curtin, of whose brigade the 48th. had been a part in the night attack, had been desperately wounded, and was taken to the rear. His loss was keenly felt, for he was a brave officer, and was the son of Governor Curtin of Pennsylvania. I was now assigned to the command of the brigade, although still holding the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In the attack across the railroad Captain Joseph



H. Hosking, of Company F., being senior officer of the 48th., took command of the regiment.

As may be readily understood from the foregoing, the efforts of our forces to take Petersburg quickly by storm had been ineffectual, and we were faced with the obvious necessity of settling down to a long siege, while the steady and determined Grant pushed regiment after regiment into a great semicircle around the city. Grant won battles; and Petersburg was to be taken.

If there is anything more trying to the nerves and spirits of American troops than trench warfare, it has yet to be discovered. It was summer, and the blazing heat on those entrenchments was frightful. Sanitary conditions were so bad that the water supply from the little creek behind us became polluted immediately. The men became restless and irritable; but the spirit of the boys was as indomitable as it had been during the intense cold the winter before in the mountains of Tennessee at Blaine's Cross Roads.

Within three days of the establishment of our lines, I began to feel the effects of the inaction. I saw what we were in for, and my restless, nervous temperament rebelled. Every time one of my boys was winged by a minie ball, I would fly into impotent rage. I insisted that our entrenchments should be deeper and the breastworks more solid. I hovered over the cooks, and cursed the commissary until our supplies were adequate. Day and night I made my rounds of the brigade, each time looking across the fields to that wooded hill of the cemetery, beyond which rose the church spires. And each time my eyes came back to the impregnable fort, a little to

our left that defied our advance. Suddenly one evening, I think it was June twenty-third, as I stood on a little rise of ground behind our lines, which commanded a view of the battlefield, one of the enlisted men of the 48th., standing near me, muttered: "We could blow that damned fort out of existence if we could run a mine shaft under it."

I walked slowly back to my tent among the trees on the opposite side of the old railroad cut, through which we had driven the enemy on our first attack. Captain George W. Gowen, now commanding my old Company C., was sitting on a box by the foot of my bed, trying to read by the light of a candle. He rose and saluted, although he was one of my warmest personal friends. I returned the salute, then threw off my coat and stretched myself.

"Gowen," I said slowly, "That God-damned fort is the only thing between us and Petersburg, and I have an idea we can blow it up. I heard one of the boys of your company talking about it, and it set me thinking."

He looked at me in astonishment for a moment. I can see his eyes now as they suddenly opened wide as he took in the feasibility of such a plan. "That's a good idea, Pleasants; but look what a distance there is between the lines. There isn't a record of anything like that having been done in the history of warfare that I know of."

"What of it?" I retorted. "The boys in your company made their daily bread before the war doing that very thing. I know, because I personally recruited most of them, who have not been killed or wounded."

"But it's several hundred feet from our lines to



the fort at the closest point", he objected. "Still, it might be done, and if you work out a plan, we'll tackle it."

The scheme grew in my mind every minute. I put on my coat again, buckled on my side arms, and set out to see another one of my old friends, Captain Frank Farquhar, at that time Chief Engineer of the Eighteenth Corps, located some distance to the right of our salient. Farquhar was another Pottsville friend, and an extremely well trained and practical civil engineer. He received me most enthusiastically. We talked together for an hour or two, and I returned to my tent encouraged, and my mind filled with plans for the possible accomplishment of my purpose.

Next morning at daybreak, I was out at the front looking over the ground. I said nothing on the subject to anyone else, that day, but interviewed every company commander in the 48th. and asked him to furnish me with a list of every practical coal miner in his unit. That evening I went to the headquarters of Brigadier-general Robert B. Potter, commanding our Division, the Second, and laid the whole matter before him. He was a fine looking man with intelligent, thoughtful, almost sad eyes; a short cropped moustache, and sparse mutton chop whiskers that reminded one strongly of Burnside. In fact, he was a good deal like old Burnside in his heartiness and sincerity. He listened attentively to me, then called for Captain McKibben of his staff, the same officer who had directed our attack at the battle of Spottsylvania Court house. The three of us talked at some length, and, while not fully committing himself, General Potter was evidently favorably impressed



with the plan. He directed McKibben to look over the ground with me the following day.

So far all was going well. McKibben reported to me next morning, and together we filed into the advance trenches, getting as close to the Confederate line as possible. When satisfactorily located, we raised our heads cautiously over the earthworks, and McKibben pointed out to me the exact location of the rebel battery. This was a most important point, and I started to jot down a note or two on a dispatch sheet, when suddenly I heard a loud "snap", like a man snapping his fingers. McKibben shuddered and reeled against me, the blood spurting out of a terrible wound in his face. He had been so intent on his observations that an enemy sharpshooter had spied him, and had done his worst.

I felt sick all over, for even with the experience in action of having men shot all around me, I never failed to shudder when a man was struck. McKibben was a particularly brave, quiet, and unostentatious officer, and I felt terribly to think that I was largely responsible for his being in such an exposed spot. He was perfectly conscious, and, in spite of his injury, insisted on walking with my support to the rear, where he was immediately removed to the hospital. Thankful I am to say that he recovered, and was brevetted Brigadier General for gallantry in action.

McKibben had however, given me the exact information I wanted most. I saw that directly east of the fort behind our lines ran a deep gully lined with trees. The line of this depression extended down into the main ravine, where the old railroad line had run, and it would be possible for my men to start operations behind our own entrenchments at the

head of this gully. In my tent I now drew a rough sketch of the terrain and relative positions of the opposing troops, and presented it to General Potter to be submitted to General Burnside. The necessary formality of having to proceed according to military channels in an important matter always irritated me to the last degree, but I was too well disciplined an officer to complain. I will here quote General Potter's letter from the official records:

“Headquarters 2nd Div. 9th Army Corps,  
June 24, 1864

Major General Jno. G. Parks,  
Chief of Staff 9th Army Corps

General:— Lieutenant Colonel Henry Pleasants, of the Forty-Eighth Penna. Veteran Volunteers, commanding First Brigade, has called upon me to express his opinion of the feasibility of mining the enemy's works in my front. Colonel Pleasants was a mining engineer in charge of some of the principal works of Schuylkill County, Penna. He has in his command upwards of eighty-five enlisted men, and fourteen commissioned officers who are professional miners. The distance from inside our work, where the mine would have to be started, to inside of enemy's work, does not exceed one hundred yards. He is of the opinion that they could run a mine forward at the rate of twenty-five to fifty feet per day, including supports, ventilation, and so on. A few miners picks, which I am informed could be made by any blacksmith from the ordinary ones; a few hand-barrows, easily constructed; one or two mathematical instruments, which would be supplied by the engineer department, and the ordinary entrenching tools, are all that are required. The men themselves



have been talking about it, and are quite desirous, seemingly, of trying it. If you desire to see Col. Pleasants, I will ride over with him or send him up to you.

R. B. Potter, Brig. Genl."

This letter was sent to Burnside, and he requested General Potter and me either to come to see him, or reduce the plan to writing. On the evening of the twenty-sixth, we rode over to his tent. It was my first opportunity to talk to our Corps Commander personally and intimately, although I had met him occasionally in an official capacity. He was sitting in his tent with his coat and hat off, his bald head shining in the candle light, a long cigar cocked at an angle from one corner of his mouth. Beads of sweat were standing on his forehead, and he wiped them off with a big silk bandanna handkerchief as he rose to greet us. I felt instantly at ease with him, and knew that I would have a sympathetic hearing. General Potter explained briefly the details of our plan, to which Burnside listened attentively, nodding his bald head and fingering his thick side whiskers. His eyes bored steadily into Potter's face during the conversation, and I knew that not a single detail was being ignored. When Potter had finished, he said quietly:

"You realize, General Potter, that so far as I know in the history of warfare no shaft or sap has ever been attempted anywhere near the length of this one you propose."

"That is true, General Burnside," Potter replied, "but Colonel Pleasants knows more of the feasibility of it than anyone else I know. It seems



reasonable to suppose that if shafts of this kind can be run in the coal regions, they can be run here. It seems worth while to make the attempt, for that fort is the only obstruction between our army and Petersburg. With that destroyed, a quick assault would carry Cemetery Hill which commands the city. Speed is the important thing right now, for the Confederates are strengthening their positions daily, and reinforcements are coming in steadily."

"I know that," agreed Burnside, "Lee is concentrating all of his forces here, and a long siege will be costly for both sides. We are bound to win out in the end by sheer force of numbers, but I am very anxious to see the war end quickly. Well," he concluded, "I am heartily in favor of the plan, but the authority for such operations, and the troop movements, which are to be considered, must come from the Commanding General of the Army of the Potomac, General Meade. You have my own authority to proceed with the work, but you will, of course, keep me informed of the progress."

General Potter and I returned to Division Headquarters well pleased with our conference with Burnside. As a matter of fact, I had been so desperately anxious to start operations that I had already organized the miners of the Forty-eighth, explained the general plan and had actually started them quietly to work in the bushes at the head of the gully. They were burrowing like rabbits, using their bayonets as picks. It was of the utmost importance that no fresh earth be observed by the enemy, so I instructed the men to nail handles to empty cracker boxes and by this means to carry each load down to the creek. Even if it should be observed there, the enemy would

assume that we were damming up that creek for bathing purposes.

Days passed, and still no word came from General Meade. I saw at once that our progress was becoming so rapid, due to the wild enthusiasm of the boys of the 48th.; that materials for supporting the walls of the tunnel would have to be obtained somewhere. There was an abandoned saw mill some distance up the creek south of us, and I sent details of men to salvage what material they could. There was also a bridge over the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad, about five or six miles distant, which yielded a large quantity of planking. It was necessary to send wagons for this, and there was infinite danger of their being captured by reconnoitering parties of enemy troops. I tried to get a troop of cavalry assigned as guard by General Meade, but my request was ignored totally. But the detail secured the lumber and returned safely. Work on the shaft went on day and night.

On July 6th.; I received a letter, evidently delayed by its passage through military channels which I quote herewith:

“Headquarters, Army of the United States,  
City Point, Va., July 3rd, 1864

Lieut. Col. Pleasants:— In order to be enabled to have a clear judgment of the progress of the mining work in front of General Burnside’s rifle pits, I would like to be furnished with:

First, A rough longitudinal section made after a certain scale through our works, neighboring the mine, through the mine gallery, and through the



enemy's works to be attacked by the mine. This section with all important numbers inscribed, will show, besides profiles of the mine gallery entrance with reference to our own defense line; the arrangement of the entrance, whether by shaft or by an incline gallery, etc, the height of the gallery in both the places not framed and such as are supplied with frames; the natural horizon near the entrance, and near the powder chamber, and finally the location, length, and height of the latter.

Second, A profile of the gallery showing its width in framed and unframed places and the width of the powder chamber.

Third, (a) When was the mining work begun? (State day and hour). (b) Has it been continued night and day without any interruption, and how many men were and are engaged on it at the same time? (c) When will the gallery be finished?

Fourth, What kind of soil is probably to be expected around the powder chamber?

Fifth, What is the intended weight of the charge, and what is the expected diameter of the crater measured on its surface?

Sixth, By what means shall the mine be fired, supposed that it shall be fired as soon as possible and with the least loss of time?

Seventh, What means shall be used for tamping the mine, and what length shall this be done?

Eighth, Where shall the standpoint be of the miner firing the charge?

Ninth, At what time in the day shall the mine be fired?

Tenth, What measures are premediated by the engineer department in accordance with the commanding General to secure the possession of the crater affected by the mine and to facilitate its defense?



The questions above should be answered without delay and as shortly as possible, only with reference to its numbers, i. e., answers to the 3rd, a, b, c, &c.

J. G. Barnard,  
Brig. Gen. Chief Eng. U. S. Armies in the Field."

I looked carefully through the dispatch envelope to see if General Barnard had not added some other question as an afterthought!

I ask you in all seriousness what your own reaction would be on the receipt of such a letter from the Chief Engineer of the Northern Army some eight days at least after practical miners had been burrowing as if their lives depended on their efforts?

But in a well disciplined army a subordinate bottles his feelings and does what he is told. In my tent by candle light, I sat down and patiently penned the following answer:

"Headquarter 48th Penna. Vet. Vols.  
Near Petersburg, Va. July 7, 1864

Brig. Gen. J. G. Barnard:— Answer to question 2nd: The gallery or tunnel is supported by props along its whole length, at a distance from each other ranging from three to thirty feet, according to the nature of the roof. When the tunnel reaches a point immediately underneath the enemy's breastworks, it is proposed to drive two galleries, each about one hundred feet in length, whose position will be immediately underneath the enemy's breastworks and fort.

Answer to question 3 (a) At 12 P. M. on the 25th of June 1864. (b) The mining has been carried on

without interruption since it was begun. There are 210 men employed every 24 hours but only two can mine at a time at the extremities of the work. (c) The tunnel will reach the enemy's work in about seven or eight days.

Answer to question 4: Sandy soil.

Answer to questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Still under consideration. The mine is ventilated by means of an air shaft, with a furnace to rarify the air and boxes to carry the gases from the interior of the gallery to the shaft.

Henry Pleasants,  
Lieut. Col., 48th Pa. Regt."

Still no word had come from General Meade at Headquarters, Army of the Potomac. Burnside had said that if Meade would not sanction it, the work could be stopped. As to Meade's opinion of the plan, I have only Burnside's statement, made to me personally that "General Meade and Major Duane, Chief engineer of the Army of the Potomac, said the thing could not be done; that it was all clap-trap and nonsense; that such a length of mine had never been excavated in military operations, and could not be; that I should either get the men smothered for want of air, or crushed by the falling of the earth, or the enemy would find it out, and it would amount to nothing."

I mention this matter merely in passing for what it is worth. Now let me quote that same Major J. C. Duane, from his own book, written just prior to the war. He was then Captain of the Corps of Engineers, United States Army. On page 208 of his "Manual for Engineer Troops—Practical Opera-

tions in Mining", the "Tools of Mining Operations" he enumerates as follows:

Pickaxe (common)	Plumb bob
" (short handled)	Boring rods
Shovel (common)	Five foot rod
" (short handled)	Bellows (miner's)
Push pick	Ventilating tube
Rake	Flexible joints
Canvas bucket	Iron candle stick
Windlass and rope	Lamp (miner's)
Rope ladder	Lantern
Wooden wedges and pins	Oil can
" pickets	Measuring tape
Miners wagon	Compass
Wheel barrow	Universal level
Hand saw	Needles, thread and scissors
Mallet	Calico for hose
Hammer (claw)	Hatchet
Rough plane	Tin funnel for fitting hose
(one quarter inch)	Rammers (short handled)
Chisel	Helves (spare)
Gimlet	Sand bags.
Two foot rule	

We made our own push picks by straightening common army picks at our blacksmith's forge. They were more convenient than bayonets, which, however, had done pretty satisfactory work thus far.

Some of the regular army solons, I cannot say who, were quoted to me as saying that "Such a length of mine could not be ventilated." Well, it was, and no one was asphyxiated. How it was done was merely a repetition of the scheme we had used



in the coal mines, to which I have referred. The mouth of our tunnel was close to one hundred feet behind our most advanced entrenchments. There was still over four hundred feet to go underground to the fort. The miners bellows were not forthcoming from Major Duane, so I had the men sink a perpendicular shaft, perhaps two feet wide from within one of the rifle pits to our tunnel. We then made an airtight canvas door shutting off the section leading back to the mouth, and built a hot fire on a grating just beneath the perpendicular shaft. As the work progressed, we ran a tight wooden pipe back to the farthest point where the men were working. The hot fire drew the foul air from the shaft, and the vacuum drew the fresh air by way of the pipe to the point where it was most needed.

But with all of the rapid progress on the part of my men, my own work remained to be done; and no one could do it except myself. The estimations of distance to be traveled, and the direction of the incline of the tunnel must be accurate to a fraction of an inch. This must be done by what is known as "triangulation" in surveying parlance. It is a delicate bit of technical engineering, but is one of the fundamental points. The instrument of precision is known as a "Theodolite". It is seen daily on the roads where grading is being done, and it looks almost like a small telescope mounted on a tripod, with a plumb bob swinging underneath. By looking through it at a certain object, and estimating by the figures on the standard of the instrument, certain calculations of grade may be estimated. By taking similar readings at other points, and co-ordinating these by mathematical formulae, a definite and accur-

ate conclusion is reached which will be the determining factor in the actual operations.

Naturally a mobile fighting unit was not equipped with a theodolite. I needed one badly, and sent to the Headquarters of General Meade for one that I knew was there; but, incomprehensible as it may seem, no attention was paid to my request. I was nearly frantic with anxiety, and utterly beside myself at the, apparently, deliberate indifference of General Meade and Major Duane. It did not take me long to reason that since they had both said the running of the mine was not possible, they had not the slightest intention of letting me prove them in error. I am not arbitrary or unjust in what I say, I am simply offering indisputable facts.

Old Burnside came nobly to my rescue. Acting on his own initiative, he telegraphed a friend in authority in Washington, D. C., and within a day or two an old-fashioned theodolite was put in my hands. If it had been of solid gold set with diamonds, it could not have been more precious to me. Having it, the next point was how to use it properly and effectively.

I have already spoken of the shocking tragedy that attended my first observations on the front line, when Captain McKibben was so desperately wounded at my side. It was both obvious and imperative that my calculations should be made from this very point, and from other points equally exposed to the fire of the enemy sharpshooters. My instrument must be put up in an advanced trench, and even if I should escape the eagle eyes of the riflemen beyond, I knew that the shiny brass would attract their attention. If they even suspected the purpose of a surveying instrument our mission would be at an end. However,



it had to be risked. I covered the outfit with a piece of burlap bag, and went to the advanced point, set the theodolite quickly in place, protected as much as possible from observation by extra shovelful of earth on the breastworks. I now had several of the riflemen move back along the trench from me and raise my own hat, together with several of theirs on bayonets in a small group, to make it appear as if an officer were discussing some important matter in the trenches. Instantly, throwing another piece of burlap surmounted by a bit of sod over my own head, I straightened up and went at my calculations. The ruse worked perfectly. The air was immediately full of bullets kicking up the earth a few feet behind me, but I was able to complete my work and retire to the next position, to carry out the same general scheme. Within a few hours I returned to my tent with a sheaf of priceless notes, and only a rather ragged and bullet pierced hat to show the accuracy of the enemy sharpshooters.

As the month of July advanced, so did the work in our tunnel. The men of the Forty-eighth were the only troops employed, for I considered it their own plan. Never will I allow myself to take the credit for the original scheme. Let that credit always remain where it belongs—to the memory of some unnamed enlisted man of the 48th., whether non-commissioned officer or private, I knew not, but the one whom I heard say, "We could blow that damned fort out of existence if we could run a mine shaft under it."

We had one rather serious accident on the second of July that made us doubly cautious in our work, and threatened to justify the predictions of the



regular army engineers. The timbers gave way, and the roof and floor nearly met. We did some quick shoring with heavy posts, and thereafter kept our supports closer together. Now another difficulty presented itself, in that the soil, instead of being sandy, became marl, of a putty like consistency, that made progress exceedingly slow. This soil hardened on exposure to the air, and the men not on duty in the shaft amused themselves by making all sorts of objects such as pipes, crosses, corps marks and the like, which they sent home as souvenirs later. To avoid this stratum of marl, I started an inclined plane rising about thirteen feet perpendicularly to each hundred feet of distance travelled.

The main gallery shaft reached completion on July 17th, just one month after our victorious night attack on the fort. I now stopped operations, for I had heard that the enemy were suspicious, and had started countermining. At midnight on the seventeenth, I determined to make my own personal investigations of this. I ordered the men out of the tunnel, and directed Captain William Winlack, commanding Company C, and one of his men, to accompany me. We crawled cautiously without lights to the head of the main shaft, where I remained lying flat on my face, my ear to the ground, while Winlack moved on into the right gallery and the other man into the left. We lay there like logs for thirty minutes, listening for the slightest sound that would give evidence of any operations above us. Nothing broke the profound stillness, not even the sound of musket fire that occasionally took place at that hour from the fort penetrated those black depths. At the expiration of that time I gave a low whistle, and my

two companions crawled back to me. I whispered to Winlack: "What do you think of any counter-boring?" He answered: "They know no more of the tunnel being under them than the inhabitants of Africa."

The tension under which I had been working so long seemed suddenly to break. I spoke to the other man, and he replied in such a low voice that I could not catch his answer. I flew into a perfect rage of temper. "Good God, man!" I roared, "Speak out so I can understand you. Why in hell do you mumble your words!" Instantly I realized what I had done, and I felt utterly foolish. It was all over in a flash, like most of my outbursts; but I was sick with the thought that I might have undone the work of weeks. We lay there for a few moments, still hearing no sound; then made our way silently out of the tunnel.

The next day, the eighteenth, we resumed operations in both the right and left galleries, and by July 22nd. work was stopped in the first, as it had reached a length of thirty-seven feet. On the twenty-third, work in the right lateral gallery was completed, it being thirty-eight feet long. Each of these galleries was provided with a powder chamber for placing the magazines containing the powder. At that time, I estimated that we had excavated, and disposed of, at least 18,000 cubic feet of earth.

## III

It is now the proper time in my narrative to review some of the official correspondence which took place at the headquarters of my various superior officers. You will recall the fact that work on the mine was begun on June 25th. at midday; and that I had been waiting with feverish impatience for some of the supplies that were urgently needed. You will recall, also, that every hour that passed by since the seventeenth of June saw the Confederate defenses of Petersburg strengthened by wire, entrenchments, and better trained man-power. Here is some of the correspondence between Major General George Gordon Meade, commanding the Army of the Potomac, written from his headquarters, about three miles south of where the operations so important were going on:

“Headquarters Army of the Potomac,  
12 M. July 3, 1864

The lieutenant general commanding has inquired of me whether an assault on the enemy's works is practicable and feasible at any part of the line held by this army. In order to enable me to reply to this inquiry, I desire, at your earliest convenience, your views as to the practicability of an assault at any point in your front, to be made by the 2nd. and 6th. Corps in conjunction with yours.

Respectfully,

George G. Meade  
Major General

Major General Burnside”



Burnside's answer to this was:

“Headquarters, Ninth Army Corps,  
July 3, 1864

I have delayed answering your dispatch until I could get the opinion of my division commanders, and have another reconnaissance of the lines made by one of my staff. If my opinion is required as to whether now is the best time to make an assault, it being understood that if not made the siege is to continue, I should unhesitatingly say, wait until the mine is finished.

If the question is between making the assault now and a change of plan looking to operations in other quarters, I should unhesitatingly say, assault now. If the assault be delayed until the completion of the mine, I think we should have a more even chance of success. If the assault can be made now, I think we have a fair chance of success provided my corps can make the attack, and it is left to me to say when and how the other two corps shall come in to my support.

I have the honor to be, general, very respectfully  
your obedient servant

A. E. Burnside,  
Major General Commanding 9th. Corps  
Major General Meade,  
Commanding Army of the Potomac.”

Take that letter of Burnside's, and analyze it very carefully. It is well worded and comprehensive. It is non-committal in many respects, as it should be; and all that he asks, in the event of his being responsible for an immediate assault on his front, that he be permitted to control the disposition of supporting troops. General Burnside himself, in his testimony

before the Congressional Committee admits that his wording of the letter was perhaps unfortunate, and was capable of misconstruction, whether intentional or otherwise. Here is Meade's Answer:

"Headquarters Army of the Potomac  
July 3, 1864

General: Your note by Major Lydig has been received. As you are of the opinion there is a reasonable degree of probability of success from an assault on your front, I shall so report to the lieutenant general commanding, and await his instructions.

The recent operations in your front, as you are aware, though sanctioned by me, did not originate in any orders from these headquarters. Should it, however, be determined to employ the army under my command in offensive operations on your front, I shall exercise the prerogative of my position to control and direct the same, receiving gladly at all times such suggestions as you may think proper to make. I consider these remarks necessary in consequence of certain conditions which you have thought proper to attach to your opinion, acceding to which in advance would not in my judgment, be consistent with my position as commanding general of this army. I have accordingly directed Major Duane, chief engineer, and Brigadier General Hunt, chief of artillery, to make an examination of your lines, and to confer with you as to the operations to be carried on, the running of the mine now in progress, and the posting of artillery. It is advisable that as many guns as possible, bearing on the point to be assaulted, should be in position.

I agree with you in opinion that the assault should be deferred till the mine is completed, provided that

can be done within a reasonably short period—say a week. Roads should be opened to the rear to facilitate the movements of the other corps sent to take part in the action, and all the preliminary arrangements possible should be made. Upon the reports of my engineers and artillery officers, the necessary orders will be given.

Respectfully yours,

Geo. G. Meade

Major General Commanding”

Major General Burnside

Commanding 9th. Corps.”

Burnside's feelings on the receipt of this utterly uncalled for rebuke may be readily imagined. He replied as follows:

“Headquarters 9th Army Corps  
July 4, 1864

General: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of last evening, and am very sorry that I should have been so unfortunate in expressing myself in my letter. It was written in haste, after just receiving the necessary data upon which to strengthen an opinion already pretty well formed. I assure you, in all candor, that I never dreamed of implying any lack of confidence in your ability to do all that is necessary in any grand movement which may be undertaken by your army. Were you to personally direct an attack from my front, I would feel the utmost confidence; and were I called upon to support an attack from the front of the 2nd. and 6th. Corps, directed by yourself, or by either of the commanders of those corps, I would do it with confidence and cheerfulness.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that I have had the utmost faith in your ability to handle troops



ever since my acquaintance with you in the army of the Potomac, and certainly accord you a much higher position in the art of war than I possess; and I, at the same time, entertain the greatest respect for the skill of the two gentlemen commanding the 2nd. and 6th. Corps; so that my duty to my country, and to you, and to myself, forbids that I should for a moment assume to embarrass you, or them, by an assumption of position or authority. I simply desired to ask the privilege of calling upon them for support at such times, and at such points, as I thought advisable. I would gladly accord to either of them the same support, and would be glad to have either of them lead the attack; but it would have been obviously improper for me to have suggested that any other corps than my own should make the attack in my front. What I asked, in reference to calling upon the other corps for support, is only what I have been called upon to do, and have cheerfully done myself, in regard to other corps commanders.

If a copy of my letter has been forwarded to the General-in-Chief, which I take for granted has been done, that he may possess my full opinion, it may make the same impression upon him as upon yourself; and I beg that you will correct it; in fact, I beg that such impression may be, as far as possible, removed wherever it has made a lodgment. My desire is to support you, and in doing that I am serving my country.

With ordinary good fortune, we can safely promise to finish the mine in a week; I hope in less time.

I have the honor to be, general, very respectfully,  
your obedient servant,

A. E. Burnside,  
Major General Commanding 9th. Army Corps.  
Major General Meade,  
Commanding Army of the Potomac."

To this letter General Meade replied:

“Headquarters Army of the Potomac  
July 4, 1864

General: Your letter of this date is received. I am glad to find that there was no intention on your part to ask for any more authority and command than you have a perfect right to expect under existing circumstances. I did not infer from your letter that you had any want of confidence in me. I rather thought you were anticipating interference from others, and thought it best to reply as I did.

Your letter has not been shown to anyone, nor forwarded to the General-in-Chief, and my answer has only been seen by the confidential clerk who copied it. I am very grateful to you for your good opinion, as expressed, and shall earnestly try to merit its continuance. In the trying position I am placed in, hardly to be appreciated by anyone not in my place, it is my great desire to be on terms of harmony and good feeling with all, superiors and subordinates; and I try to adjust the little jars that will always exist in large bodies to the satisfaction of each one. I have no doubt, by frankness and full explanations, such as have now taken place between us, all misapprehensions will be removed. You may rest assured, all the respect due to your rank and position will be paid you while under my command.

Truly yours,  
George G. Meade  
Major General.”

It is possible that in my general education and contact with cultured and intelligent persons, as well as in my years of military experience, there was left



out some part that would make me understand how a man in the position of General Meade could take umbrage at Burnside's letter. To my moderately intelligent mind it looks to me as if there was a precariously placed chip resting on the two-star epaulet. It is well for Meade, and a tragedy for all concerned, that the two letters were not forwarded, AS IN ALL MILITARY REGULATIONS THEY SHOULD HAVE BEEN, to General Grant. How magnanimous Meade was in withholding them!

Still there was no help from the noble headquarters of the Army of the Potomac in providing materials for the rapid completion of the mine, which Meade in his letter seemed to be waiting for before ordering the assault. Read again what he says: "I agree with you in opinion that the assault should be deferred till the mine is completed, *provided that it can be done within a reasonably short period—say a week.*" We were still waiting for the theodolite at that time; and my men were still using cracker boxes for handbarrows!

During this period of masterly indifference at the Headquarters Army of the Potomac, old Burnside, with his bluff loyalty, and heartfelt interest, had not been idle. I will quote his exact words on the subject, taken from stenographic records of his testimony, lest there be any misapprehension of my having interjected my own opinions. He said in that testimony:

"The 4th. division of the ninth corps under command of General Ferraro, composed entirely of colored troops, had been detached at the beginning of the campaign, from my immediate command, and



had received orders directly from General Grant's and General Meade's headquarters up to the crossing of the James River.

During the month of July it was at intervals under my command, and I had made up my mind, in case an assault was to be made by the 9th Corps, to put this division in the advance. I had so informed General Ferraro, and at my suggestion, he submitted to me an opinion as to the formation which would be the most effective in passing over the ground in our front; which formation, after some consideration, I approved, and directed him to drill his troops with a view of making the attack in that way.

This first conversation must have been some three weeks before the attack was made, on the 30th. of July.

The work on the mine was prosecuted with as much rapidity as possible, but it took a longer time to complete it than was first supposed. Many obstacles were encountered, all of which, however, were finally overcome. There was, besides these natural obstacles, a considerable degree of personal discouragement during the prosecution of the work. Prominent officers expressed their fears that a mine of that length could not be successfully run, and particularly by the plan which Colonel Pleasants had adopted, that of simply relying upon the tenacity of the earth to keep the gallery intact, instead of putting up continuous supports along its whole length. His plan, however, succeeded, and the mine was finished not far from the 20th. of July. I have not the means in my possession at this time of determining the exact date of its completion.

When completed, the fact was reported to General Meade, after which considerable discussion took place in reference to the charge that was necessary to explode the mine. In my opinion it should have been

a charge of 12,000 pounds of powder, and I so expressed myself. It was finally decided that the charge should be 8,000 pounds. I do not mention this as anything material, but it happens to be a fact.

\* \* \*

“On the 26th. of July, I think, General Meade called upon me through his chief of staff for a detailed statement of my plan of attack from my front. I then sent him the following communication:

‘Headquarters 9th. Army Corps  
July 26, 1864

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your notes of this morning by Captains Jay and Bache; and also a telegram from the commanding general relating to the same subject.

It is altogether probable that the enemy are cognizant of the fact that we are mining, because it is mentioned in their papers, and they have been heard at work on what are supposed to be shafts in close proximity of our galleries.

But the rain of night before last has no doubt much retarded their work. We have heard no sound of workmen in them either yesterday or today, and nothing is heard by us in the mine of the ordinary sounds of work on the surface above. This morning we had some apprehension that the left lateral gallery was in danger of caving in from the weight of the batteries above it, and the shock of their firing. But all possible precautions have been taken to strengthen it, and we hope to preserve it intact.

The placing of the charges in the mine will not involve the necessity of making a noise. It is therefore probable that we will escape discovery if the mine is to be used within two or three days. It is,



nevertheless, highly important, in my opinion, that the mine should be exploded at the earliest possible moment consistent with the general interests of the campaign. I state to you the facts as nearly as I can, and, in the absence of any knowledge as to the meditated movements of the army, I must leave you to judge of the proper time to make use of the mine. But it may not be improper for me to say that the advantages reaped from the work would be but small if it were exploded without any co-operation movement.

My plan would be to explode the mine just before daylight in the morning, or at about five o'clock in the afternoon; mass the two brigades of the colored divisions in rear of my first line in columns of division 'double columns closed in mass', 'the head of each brigade resting on the front line', and, as soon as the explosion has taken place, move them forward with instructions for the division to take half distance, and as soon as the leading regiments of the two brigades pass through the gap in the enemy's line, the leading regiments of the right brigade to come into line perpendicular to the enemy's line by the 'right companies on the right into line, wheel', the 'left companies on the right into line', and proceed at once down the line of the enemy's works as rapidly as possible; and the leading regiment of the left brigade to execute the reverse movement to the left, moving up the enemy's line. The remainder of the columns to move directly toward the crest in front as rapidly as possible, diverging in such a way as to enable them to deploy in columns of regiment, the right column making as nearly as possible for Cemetery Hill. These columns to be followed by the other divisions of the other corps as soon as they can be thrown in.

This would involve the necessity of relieving these



divisions by other troops before the movement, and of holding columns of other troops in readiness to take our place on the crest in case we gain it, and sweep down it. It would, in my opinion, be advisable, if we succeed in gaining the crest, to throw the colored division right into the town. There is a necessity for the co-operation, at least in the way of artillery, by the troops on our right and left. Of the extent of this you will necessarily be the judge. I think our chances of success in a plan of this kind are more than even.

The main gallery of the mine is 522 feet in length, the side galleries about forty feet each. My suggestion is that eight magazines be placed in the lateral galleries, two at each end, say a few feet apart in branches at right angles to the side gallery, and two more in each of the side galleries, similarly placed by pairs situated equidistant from each other and the end of the galleries, thus:

Tamp, beginning at the termination of the main gallery, say one hundred feet, leaving all the space in the side galleries. Run out some five or six fuses, and two wires, to render the ignition charge certain.

I propose to put in each of the eight magazines from 1200 to 1400 pounds of powder, the magazines to be connected by a trough of powder, instead of a fuse.

I beg to enclose a copy of a statement from General Potter on the subject.

I would suggest that the powder train be parked in a woods near our ammunition train, about a mile in rear of this place. Lieutenant Colonel Pierce, chief quartermaster, will furnish Captain Strong with a guide to the place. I beg also to request that General Benham be instructed to send us at once

eight thousand sand bags, to be used for tamping, and other purposes.

A. E. Burnside,  
Major General

Major General Humphreys,  
Chief of Staff."

I have quoted General Burnside's letter simply in order to show how clearly and definitely his plans were laid. To the average reader there may be some technicalities of military operations that may be a little hard to follow, but on careful reading, they are astonishingly clear and simple. To make it slightly more plain as to the first part, let us consider that the colored divisions were to move instantly forward under their leaders into the breach made in the enemy's line by the explosion. As soon as they had reached this vital point, they were to attack immediately right and left, so as to widen the breach already made. The other divisions following them were to continue on and spread out like a fan, smothering any opposition, and permit the quick advance of the last contingent consisting of all of the forces available, to that coveted strong point, Cemetery Ridge. Petersburg would then be ours, and the war of the Rebellion would probably be over, for it would immediately dismember Lee's great army, and the fall of Richmond would be inevitable.

## IV

I have given verbatim excerpts from official documents in order that it may be clearly understood what preparations were being made at Burnside's, Meade's and Grant's headquarters. To put the attitudes of the chief commanders briefly and accurately, Burnside was enthusiastic; Meade was cynical and skeptical, if not actually hostile; Grant was dull and indifferent.

Burnside's enthusiasm and hearty support took a tangible form. Of his three divisions under Potter, Ledlie and Ferraro, Potter's division had stood the brunt of one of the most active campaigns of the war, which I have described in some detail. Of that division, one regiment, my own Forty-eighth, had performed the herculean task of running the tunnel and galleries. The men were exhausted, and, while their eagerness and spirit made them as anxious as I was to lead the attack on the crest, I could understand the attitude of General Burnside in refusing to permit this, or even to consider it, for a moment when his plans of attack were being laid. It was highly probable that nearly every man in the regiment that led the attack would be killed or wounded, particularly if the attack should progress as far as the Cemetery, where the Confederates would fight like tigers at bay. The Forty-eighth had already made a victorious assault in the beginning of the operations around Petersburg, and besides, had lost a large number of men by sharpshooters' fire in the trenches.



They had been occupying the front line trenches for more than a month; and in that advanced position it had been difficult to supply them with proper food. This had to be brought up from the rear at odd times. Ledlie's division was largely composed of greener troops who had not seen much active battle service, but had also been on the front line continuously, and in this exposed position had been trained in self-preservation against rifle fire. They had learned to duck at the sound of a musket; and it was unlikely that they would make an attack in anything like well disciplined formation. The division of General O. B. Wilcox was in about the same status as that of General Ledlie.

The 4th. Division under General Ferraro was composed of colored troops under white officers. As I have stated before, the experiment of using colored troops was begun early in that year, 1864, and was still subjudice. But thus far in the campaign, for example, the storming of the advanced works of the enemy, these troops had given an excellent account of themselves. They were brave, and almost primitively ruthless fighters; they stood up particularly well under the blazing heat of midsummer; they would follow their white leaders into the very jaws of death, and their ranks had not been decimated by other active engagements. Ferraro had not distinguished himself particularly in any part of our former campaigns, but he had come through certainly experienced in military offensive tactics. Of his subordinates, General J. K. Sigfried, the former commanding officer of the Forty-eighth, was a brigade commander, and his quiet bravery and skil-

ful leadership had been tested and proved on many occasions.

I was neither surprised nor disappointed when I was told that Burnside had selected Ferraro's (4th.) Division to lead the attack. To my mind it was a wise and obvious selection, however much I personally desired to have my own brigade of Potter's Division complete the work of breaking the Confederate lines and capturing Petersburg after having destroyed the most sinister obstacle. I was immensely pleased to see during the early part of June that each day one of the colored regiments would be withdrawn to a point back of the lines and put through a drill in the tactics that were to be employed should the mine be successful in blowing up the fort. These negro troops became imbued with a tremendous spirit of enthusiasm over the great honor that had been conferred upon them, and each day they went through their secret rehearsals as if it were some tremendous religious ceremony, their black faces serious, almost reverent; and their burly non-commissioned officers relaying commands in low gruff voices that brought clocklike precision of response. I became fascinated with their primeval attitude of mind, and I watched them frequently, for upon those faithful black soldiers must depend the success or failure of my great project. I visited General Sigfried as often as possible, and was more than impressed with his complete understanding of his men, and his almost pathetic eagerness to bring glory and honor to the Forty-eighth.

"These boys are trained to the minute, Colonel Pleasants," he said one evening about the twentieth of July when we were waiting impatiently for orders



after the completion of the shafts, "If that mine should be exploded tomorrow morning, every man of my brigade would be in his place and do just what was expected of him. The whole command is on edge. It is like some queer fantastic orgy that they are going through, working up their emotions to the highest pitch. Look at them now." He pointed to a group of black figures gathered around a campfire, the flickering yellow light playing on the sober faces; the whites of their serious big eyes standing out against the ebony black of their faces and the dark shadows of the surrounding trees. One big giant of a negro, naked to the waist, was standing before the group talking to them in a low musical monotone; at certain definite intervals in his harangue, his great body would begin to quiver, then his arms and legs would move rhythmically and he would break into a deep bass chant:

"We looks like men a marchin on;  
We looks like men er war"

As the melodious voice struck the low "e", it reminded one of a magnificent violincello in the hands of maestro. The group at the fire now caught the spirit and began slowly weaving to and fro, chanting the lines and stretching great long black arms toward their leader, tensing their muscles and flexing their great fingers in an ecstasy of fervor. The scene was almost terrifying in its spiritual impressiveness and I stood silent, reverent.

"You see what I mean," said General Sigfried quietly.

The mine was entirely completed and ready for the powder on the 23rd. of July. Now came one of those incomprehensible delays that turn a man's hair



gray. The powder was not forthcoming; and no reason for this was given out from General Meade's headquarters except that they were not ready to spring the mine. Never in my whole military or civilian career did I go through such a period of frenzied anxiety. What little sleep I got from sheer exhaustion was broken by wild, terrifying dreams from which I woke drenching with sweat, with the feeling that the relentless counterboring, which we could hear distinctly now in our lateral galleries, had struck our tunnel. Just one drive of a crowbar or boring tool would undo the entire feverish labor of the past four weeks. Each day I would rush up to Burnside's headquarters for possible news.

"I can't understand it, Colonel Pleasants," old Burnside would say, pulling nervously at his whiskers, his honest face haggard and drawn with the same anxiety I myself felt, "I have literally prayed to Meade to get us the powder and spring the mine. Deserters from the enemy have already told us that the troops in the fort are suspicious. The only thing that has saved us so far, I believe, is that the Confederates have an idea that our mining operations are farther to the southwest near the Jerusalem Plank Road. There they are doing a lot of counter-mining. If we could only get some action!"

At last, on the twenty-eighth of July, we got a curt message that the powder was ready for us. I rushed down to the ammunition train to really see for myself. There it was in ominous black kegs. I counted them twice.

"Where is the rest?" I demanded of the lieutenant, for I had requisitioned fourteen thousand pounds

and my count showed but eight thousand, one thousand to each chamber.

"I do not know, sir," he replied, "My orders called for just this consignment."

"But I requisitioned fourteen thousand pounds," I replied.

"I'm sorry, sir, but if there had been a mistake, the Colonel will have to take it up with headquarters. This invoice calls only for eight thousand pounds. Will the Colonel please sign this for me?", he proffered the slip.

My hand shook with rage as I scribbled my name on the paper. I then directed my men to get to work and place the charges immediately, while I stormed back to Corps headquarters.

"I'm desperately sorry, Colonel Pleasants," General Burnside said, when I told him the news. "I'm afraid, however, that nothing can be done about it. The order for fourteen thousand pounds was, on recommendation of Duane and others of his staff, definitely disapproved by Meade, I suppose, or I assume that the men are getting it ready now. We ought to be able to spring it late this afternoon, or at least tomorrow morning. The troop movement orders ought to come from General Meade any moment."

I saluted and thanked General Burnside, then hastened back to the entrance of the mine, following the men in to the lateral shafts and seeing that the magazines were properly placed in the eight chambers. I was especially careful to have the sand bags interspersed with logs placed in such a way that plenty of oxygen would reach the powder and augment the force of the explosion. It was desperately



damp in the laterals, for under our feet a great deal of water had accumulated, and I was in an agony of fear lest the powder become damp. We placed wooden supports under the magazines, and raised the trough for the powder train several inches from the ground. When this was done, I covered this over with waterproof material and closed off the entrance to the main gallery with sand bags, leaving only a small opening through which we could run our fuses to the powder train. All that remained now was the laying of the fuses. I had ordered three sections, each five hundred feet long; and had also asked for a galvanic battery and wires to augment the fuses. If the mine was to be sprung at a certain hour, the battery would be instantaneous. If it should not work, we would simply have to delay a few minutes while the fuses sizzled. When this had been done, I crawled out of the mine, and back to a clump of trees where Captain Hosking, now commanding my regiment, was standing with a group of officers and non-coms. They were all looking down at a burlap-covered bale, the end of which had been opened, showing a section of fuse. I felt a degree of relief when I saw it, for there had been so many delays and garbling of orders that I feared it had been left out.

"That the fuse?" I asked. "That's fine."

"Yes, but look at it, Colonel," said Captain Hosking, reaching down and drawing up a coil. "This is just common blasting fuse, and it is all cut up into short lengths, some of them are only ten feet long."

I think I had an attack of actual hysterics. They tell me that my eyes fairly popped out of my head, and my face was absolutely purple with rage. For



a moment I could not speak, then I erupted like a volcano with all the profanity I could command, and it was a plenty. The outburst did me some good by letting off steam. When I had calmed down sufficiently to become coherent, I immediately dispatched two of the men to the Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac for the proper fuse. At the same time, I ordered the short lengths to be spliced by the practical miners who knew their business. That evening, the twenty-eighth, by six P. M. we had the spliced fuse laid and all was in readiness. We still waited for the proper fuse, for my messengers were informed that the long sections were not available, but that "they had sent for them."

Now came a delay more aggravating, if possible, than the first. There was no word from General Meade as to when the attack was to be made. I learned that General Burnside had visited General Meade on the twenty-eighth, and that some difficulty had arisen regarding the disposition of the troops. This was none of my affair, and I forebore asking any questions. Poor old Burnside was nearly beside himself over something. I knew that from other officers. Still no definite word; and the powder was not getting any drier in those chambers underground.

Finally on the afternoon of the twenty-ninth, nearly twenty-four hours after the charge had been placed, I was summoned to Corps Headquarters. General Burnside was pacing restlessly up and down his tent like a wild man. He answered my salute and sat down wearily in his chair.

"I have just received orders from General Meade that the mine will be sprung at 3:30 A. M. to-

morrow," he said tersely, "I presume you have all in readiness."

"Yes, sir, all but the long fuses. I have spliced the sections we have. If the others come they can be put into place immediately."

"They are probably on their way. Even if they had to come from Fortress Monroe, they could get here in twenty-four hours. You sent for them at noon yesterday. But that is not the only trouble. General Meade has insisted on changing my battle orders at the last minute."

"Good God, General Burnside, what do you mean?"

"Only this: He has refused to sanction the use of Ferraro's colored troops in the assault. He insists that they are not to be trusted and are not experienced. He also says that we would be criticised by the public for pushing colored troops into dangerous action. Can you believe it? I went over and talked with him personally yesterday for an hour or more, but all I could get out of him was that he would see General Grant personally about it, and abide by his decision. Now comes the final result of that conference, of course upholding General Meade. I must now choose a white division with no training to get ready in twelve hours and pass by the colored division that has been doing nothing except drill for that one manoeuvre under such men as your old commander,, General Sigfried. I am expecting my three division commanders, Potter, Wilcox and Ledlie to confer with me in a few minutes, so will ask you to excuse me when they come. Your own brigade will be held entirely in reserve, and will not take part in the assault. They are worn out."



"May I ask one favor of you, General Burnside?" I asked, "May I volunteer my services on the staff of General Potter? He has been so enthusiastic over the project that I feel sure he will accomplish whatever is humanly possible."

"That is granted, Colonel Pleasants, but I have not yet made up my mind which division is to lead the assault. That is to be determined shortly. I will assign you as provost-marshal for that day, on my own staff, and assign you to duty with General Potter."

That afternoon at the conference occurred one of those strange lapses of judgment that go to make up the uncertainties that are part of the human machine, and against which all efforts in military training are constantly directed. The harrassed old warrior, having seen many reasons for and against the leadership of each of the three white divisions in the assault, finally left the matter to chance, and had the three division commanders draw lots for this vitally important work. The lot fell to General Ledlie, commanding the First Division. When General Sigfried, commanding the first brigade of Ferraro's Fourth (colored) Division heard of the sudden change of plans, he almost broke down with disappointment. That night at the campfires of the negroes there was no chanting. The black men sat silent in groups "studyin".

There was little for me to do now except wait for the moment to light the fuse, for batteries and wires had not been supplied. I was nervous and restless. Sleep was out of the question. In my tent I got out my writing materials and wrote one or two letters. I also finished one which I had begun on the twenty-



third, but which I had not sent, fearing it might by accident fall into the hands of the enemy. I will quote it here, for it gives an idea of my feelings:

“Near Petersburg, Va.  
July 23, 1864

Dear Uncle,

I have read both yours and Uncle James' welcome letters, but have not had time to answer them. I have worked harder of late with body and brain than I ever did in my life before. I have projected, undertaken and completed a gigantic work; and have accomplished one of the greatest things in this war. I have excavated a mine gallery from our line to and under the enemy's works. This mine is 511 feet in length, and has lateral galleries of 75 feet, making a total distance of 586 feet.

I am under one of their principal forts, and as soon as the “high authorities” are ready, will put 12,000 (twelve thousand) lbs, of powder in 9 enormous magazines and will blow fort, cannon and rebels to the clouds.

The chief engineer of the Army and the rest of the regular army wiseacres said it was not feasible; that I could not carry the ventilation that distance without digging a hole to the surface, and that I would either get the men crushed by fall of earth, or have them smothered.

Old Burnside stood by me. Told me to go ahead and I have succeeded.

When I began I had neither an inch of board or a single nail. I caused our big picks to be made smaller; got cracker boxes, and made hand barrows out of them, and went ahead day and night until I finished it.

I now wait the order to put in the powder and reap

the fruits of the work. It is terrible, however, to hurl several men with my own hand at one blow into eternity, but I believe I am doing right.

Be sure not to speak of this matter outside of Uncle James and Aunt Emily, until the thing is done:— then I will give you a fuller account.

Love to all

Affec.

Henry''

## V

At three o'clock on the morning of July 30th., 1864, I buckled on my sabre and pistol, and started out from my tent. It was the hour when all nature seemed to have fallen into its period of most profound repose. There was a faint streak of light beginning to tint the eastern sky on the horizon line, but, with the exception of an occasional "cheep" from an early-rising robin, there was profound black stillness all around me. The intermittent picket fire that usually kept up most of the night had stopped, and the entire battle front, where over one hundred and twenty thousand men were assembled, was as peaceful as a New England farm.

I made my way down the path into the ravine, crossed the little stream and hastened up the slope towards the gully where the mine opening was located. Now I heard the sound of low voices and the clink of metal, and on my left I saw the massed outline of figures in the open space to my left. It was Wilcox's division drawn up ready to follow Ledlie's in the assault. Back of them somewhere was Potter's Division, and still farther back in the trees beyond the old railroad cut were the disappointed negroes, whose hopes of leading the great final charge that might win freedom for their own people had been so suddenly shattered. I reached the clump of trees at the mouth of the tunnel where a dozen or more figures were sitting on the ground. They rose and



saluted as I approached. I struck a match behind my hat, and looked at my watch—three-ten.

“Everything ready, boys?” I asked quietly.

“Yes, sir,” came the voice of Captain Hosking out of the gloom, “I have been in the tunnel as far as the tamping at the end of the main gallery and stuck my hand through to the trough. I think the powder is still dry enough to explode. I heard no sounds to make me think the galleries had been discovered.”

“Thank God for that,” I muttered, “Three minutes more.”

It was lighter now, and to the left of us I could clearly make out the ranks of the leading division back of our advanced entrenchments. Far beyond reared the dim outline of the fort, silent and ominous. A mocking bird burst out into a glorious tremolo of song in a thicket just behind us. Somewhere up the line a rifle cracked, its echoes reverberating through the ravine, gathering in volume into a low roar as of distant cannon. I entered the tunnel accompanied by Lieutenant Jacob Douty and Sergeant Henry Reese, made my way to the end of the trough, struck a match and lit the fuse. Instantly it sputtered, sizzled; and with a burst of acrid smoke the line of glowing fire disappeared into the dark hole before us.

“I’ll give it twenty minutes, boys,” I said, looking at my watch.

“Half of that, Colonel, if that fuse is good,” said Douty.

We crawled quickly out of the tunnel, rose to our feet, and stood there tense and expectant. Dawn was rapidly approaching, and the sounds of activity

in the great camp began to be heard. A horse neighed loudly from the cavalry section beyond the hilltop behind us. In the massed division near us I caught the sound of low voices—"Gimme a swig o' that canteen, Bill, mine's gone."—"Where's my goddam bayonet." "Push over ther, Jed, yer on my feet." "Wot th' hell's keepin' us?"

"Silence, men!" came the gruff order from an officer, and the voices subsided.

The hands of my watch slowly moved around to ten minutes of four, and we rose to our feet, staring at the ramparts beyond. Still it stood as ominous and silent as ever. I grew restless and paced nervously up and down. Something was wrong. Had the fuse gone out; or was the powder in the trough too wet to burn? The minutes passed. The men in the trenches grew restless and noisy. No longer could the gruff voice of the officer still their comments. Four o'clock, four-ten, four-fifteen. God! what was the matter?

"Boys, something is wrong. Either the powder is damp, or the fuse is out. I will see. I know the most likely spot is where it was spliced."

I started into the tunnel, but Douty and Reese were already plunging ahead of me. Captain Hosking laid his hand on my arm. "Stay here, Colonel. Two are enough; three are too many."

A few minutes later Reese came tumbling out on all fours.

"Give me a knife, somebody. Colonel Pleasants is right. It went out where it was spliced. We'll have it fixed." He grabbed the knife and dove back into the black hole.

Five minutes passed. In the meantime a mes-

senger had come up, breathless from running. He handed me a dispatch and, in the steadily increasing daylight, I read:

“Headquarters Army of the Potomac  
July 30, 1864. 4¼ A. M.

Major General Burnside:

Is there any difficulty in exploding the mine? It is now three quarters of an hour later than that fixed upon for exploding it.

	A. A. Humphreys
	Major General and Chief of Staff
Official	S. Williams
	Asst. Adjt. Genl.”

I quickly tore off a sheet of dispatch paper and scribbled a few words to General Burnside, stating that the fuse had gone out, but that it was being spliced, and I thought the explosion would probably occur in eleven minutes. I handed it to the messenger, who dashed off. A few minutes later Douty and Reese came bursting out of the shaft. They were covered with mud, and gasping for breath from the fumes of the burning fuse. “It’s all right, Colonel. She’s burning.”

We all jumped out of the bushes and stood with our eyes glued on the fort. I glanced hurriedly at my watch. It was now sixteen minutes of five, just exactly eleven minutes from the time I had sent the message to General Burnside. Was the powder—?

“There she goes!” every one sang out at once.

From the center of the great earthworks before us a solid sheet of flame suddenly shot up, up, up



almost deliberately it seemed, topped by an amazing volume of gray-black smoke mounting straight up. Now a sudden grinding dull roar, and a breath-taking concussion of the atmosphere reached us, almost knocking us off our feet. We grasped each other for support, but stood aghast at the awful spectacle before us. The great smoke cloud now spread out like a gigantic mushroom, and in its midst we could make out the forms of men, guns, clothing, boards, and even cannon hovering in mid-air for a second, then crashing horribly back to earth with an enormous cloud of dust rising with the impact of the debris.

The massed troops of the First Division, stood spellbound for a second, then scuttled back out of the range of rocks, rifles, and masses of earth that rained upon them from the clouds. Now their officers leaped on the parapets and cursed and swore at them, until once again the division was in some sort of formation. They stood huddled a little raggedly, and evidently shaken, while the non-coms struggled to get the lines straight.

For a moment after the explosion there was a frightful silence, before the little stampede of the men of the First Division. Now as the soldiers organized, there was a booming of our own cannon from the batteries to our right, and a whine of shells passing over what had once been the fort. The First Division moved steadily and in fairly good order over the advance parapet, and began moving aside the abatis that obstructed their march to the crest. I looked for their division commander, but he was nowhere to be seen. The regiments were following their own commanders up the hill. Up they

scrambled over the advance trenches of the enemy apparently meeting no resistance.

"Look, men," I cried, "We've taken the crest." I jumped out of the bushes and made my way to where General Potter stood at the head of his division, which was to be the third division in order of advance. As I saluted, he leaped forward and grasped me by the hand, his face working convulsively in his emotion:

"Colonel, you did it! You did it! God Bless you, it's perfect!"

I think my eyes filled. Potter had always given me loyal support. We jumped on a slight elevation and watched the second brigade of the first division now straggling through the narrow opening in the abatis, and hesitatingly gather behind the others, close to the left side of the remains of the fort. For a moment I stared at them through my field glasses, and saw them crowding closer and closer, and staring into what I knew was the crater. Now the last regiments of the division scrambled up the earthworks, and they, too, hesitated at the rim, pushing and crowding each other, some leaping down out of sight.

"Great God! General Potter, those regiments up there are a disorganized mob. Look at them!" I screamed. "They have no leader to tell them to move on. I'm going up there now."

Leaving the general, I dashed on up the slope to the crumbled mass of debris that had once been that imposing fort. Scrambling past the soldiers who were still climbing up with the stragglers of the first division, I reached the crest and for a second stood speechless at the awful sight that met my eyes. A



great gaping hole some twenty to thirty feet deep, and well over two hundred feet long lay before me. In the bottom lay crumpled, inert figures, some mere torsos, heads and arms gone. Twisted pieces of sheetiron and boards; dismembered artillery wheels, sections of caissons, canvas covers and wrecked cannon lay where they had fallen. In the mass of soft earth, I made out struggling figures half buried. Men were screaming for help. I felt sick all over, but there was no time to be lost.

"Get over there to the left, men, with your regiments. Form over THERE, beyond." I screamed.

"Where'n hell is my goddam regiment?" inquired a surly private in a new uniform, evidently a recruit, who was chewing tobacco unconcernedly. I flew into a rage.

"Over THERE, DAMN YOU!" I pointed across the crater.

"Oh, awl right, awl right, don't git sore, officer." He moved off in a leisurely way somewhere into the mob, and I leaped down among the men who had descended into the mess.

"Get out of here, quick. Go up to your regiments. Out, Out!" I yelled, pushing and striking, right and left.

It was no use. Men were coming into the hole in droves, apparently out of sheer curiosity; though some were digging out half buried Confederates. The fact that there was a war going on seemed to have passed out of their minds. I saw that it was hopeless to move them. The important thing was to get some other division into action where it belonged. Ledlie's division, or what there was of it, was trying to form its units on the left of the crater, its officers



screaming orders at the top of their lungs. They were standing in the open at the crest of the hill, completely exposed to the rifle fire that I was sure would open up in a minute or two. "If only Potter could get his men up here on the right," I thought, and scrambled up the crumbling sides. Down the hill I raced at full speed to General Potter.

"General, its simply bedlam up there. That first division is nothing more than a mob. They're on the crest; and if they would only get into formation they could walk to Cemetery Hill. But half of them are staring into the crater or fooling down at the bottom. Can't you take your division up to the right? There is no fire from that side. I think the whole enemy line is paralyzed.

"I'll do it as soon as I can, Colonel Pleasants," he answered, his voice cool and steady. "But my orders are to follow Wilcox; and his men are already advancing up that covered way. There is no room for my division to get through. I'll try something, even if it is not according to orders." He turned and gave some instructions to his chief of staff. Presently we moved obliquely to the right and worked our units slowly back of the 2nd. Division. I marched at his side, trying to compose myself. My hands were hurting terribly now. I looked down at them and found them blistered and bleeding.

"What happened to you, Colonel Pleasants?" General Potter inquired.

"I'm afraid I did that striking and pushing those poor fools in the crater. I was trying to get them up into their regiments before the rebels opened up on them.—There, listen to that. I thought so."

A battery on the hill to our left had now opened

up, and I saw a shell fall right beside the milling mob on the left of the crater. Now, muskets began to crack, and I saw many poor fellows drop in their tracks; the rest, with one accord, made a dash for the hole beside them and disappeared from view. I knew what was happening. The crater was filling with disorganized troops; and God help them when the enemy shells landed in that crater.

Potter's division made slow progress up the hill, but at length we reached the crest and stood on a parapet to the right of the crater and somewhat in advance of the line that had been the Confederate front. One of the regiments found difficulty in climbing over the high parapets, and Potter ordered a halt until it should catch up. We now awaited the assault by the first two divisions, for our orders thus far had been exceeded, and Potter's division had been supposed to follow Wilcox. We stood where we were, impatiently watching, as the 3rd. Division, which had been designated as second in order, crawled slowly up the hill, and, instead of coming around between us and the crater, plunged directly into it.

"My soul and body, what a mess!" Potter cried. "Here we have to stand and watch that. Pleasants, for Heaven's sake, go back and find out where Ledlie is. Somebody has to get order out of this chaos. Get Wilcox; get anybody."

I made my way up to one of the bomb proofs by Taylors Creek ground, about four hundred yards in the rear of the mine opening, where, someone told me, I would find Ledlie. Sure enough, there he was sitting comfortably on a cracker box. A surgeon, I believe his name was Chubb, was doing some dress-



ing of a wounded man back in one corner. I saluted.

"General Ledlie, your division is in complete disorder and the men are huddled in the crater. They are holding up the advance."

"So?" he said, thickly. "I'll 'tend to it. Here, orderly, take this message. Tell those dam' regimental commanders to go on like I told 'em. I've already tol' 'em once; now I'll tell 'em again. Dam' young upstarts." He weaved unsteadily on his box and rolled his eyes up at me. The truth suddenly dawned upon me, as I smelled the reek of liquor. I flew into another of my rages.

"You lousy coward!" I yelled, shaking my fist in his face, "Give me that uniform with your two stars, and I'll lead your men for you."

He looked at me dozily for a moment. "Can't do it," he muttered, "Yo' get all mad over nothin'. I'm division c'mander; an' when I tell 'em t' go, they go. Dam' upstarts! Ah, here comes ol' O. B. Wilcox, th' c'mander of t'other division. He'll tell you the same, I bet. Can't get his dam' men out for mine; an' I can't get mine out for his. C'mon in Wilcox; less have 'nother little drink an' then send 'nother message. I'm goin' t' put Bartlett in command of th' division. He's up there."

Do you think I am exaggerating? Look in the Congressional records, and see what Surgeon Chubb said. It is on page 103. Also look on page 118 of the same record, and see what Surgeon H. E. Smith says. I have only given the conversation as I remember it.

I left the bombproof feeling utterly sick at my stomach. There is no need to tell all of the details of that day's nightmare. By nine o'clock in the



morning, the Confederates collected their senses and proceeded to pour into that crater such a hell of artillery fire as the world has never seen. They raked the hill on both sides with rifle fire, until no living being could stand against it. The poor old colored troops were finally led out and up the hill. They charged, some through, some to the right, of the crater; but on they went straight into the inferno before them, yelling and shouting. At the head of one brigade I saw Sigfried, cool as ever, and brave as a lion. Suddenly there rose before them a wall of gray-clad figures with bayonets. The negroes stopped, broke and fled back, some tumbling into the crater, some dashing down the traverses. The crest had been retaken. Cemetery Hill now lay enveloped in the smoke of defenders' cannon, through which occasionally came a glimpse of church spires in Petersburg beyond.

The beginning of the end of that assault was the retaking of the crest by the Confederates. After that, it was not a question as to how our men could advance, but how the trapped mass in the crater could get out and back to the Union lines. The fire of the enemy was raking the open ground like the spray of a fire hose, and every attempt of a man to cross through it was simply sudden death. The men in the crater had no water, and were under the merciless sun with the thermometer high in the nineties. It was early in the afternoon when they finally surrendered. By this time, Wilcox's division, or what there was of it, had been driven in confusion back towards the Union lines south of the crater.

But there still seemed to us that there was a chance for another assault on Cemetery Hill. Potter's

men held their position east of the crater on the high ground, and were protected enough to withstand the fire that came from three sides. I was most of the time with General Potter, anxiously awaiting the orders that should be forthcoming from Burnside. Something must have gone wrong. Why the delay? Just then a messenger crowded through the men and placed a dispatch in his hands. He read it, and turned to me saying, "I must report at once to General Burnside, here is the message."

"United States Military Telegraph  
Headquarter Ninth Army Corps, July 30, 1864

I have no discretion in the matter. The order is peremptory to withdraw. It may be best to entrench where we are for the present; but we must withdraw as soon as practicable and prudent.

A. E. Burnside  
Major General

Brigadier General White  
Chief of Staff"

Below this was written:

"Division commanders will instruct in accordance with the within dispatch. The officers on the line to consult and determine the time of evacuation.

By order of General Burnside

J. White  
Brigadier General and Chief of Staff  
Official Edward M. Niel  
Assistant Adjutant General"

It was then somewhere near two o'clock in the afternoon. Potter suggested that I accompany him,

and remain outside the headquarters of Burnside while the conference was going on. I might be needed to clear up some point. We went over to Battery No. 14, and Potter left me. As he entered the log and sod enclosure, I heard the sound of heated voices, and above them all the voice of the harrassed Burnside: "Gentlemen, the order to withdraw is peremptory from General Meade. I am sorry, very sorry. I received this order some hours ago and went to Meade's headquarters. He finally agreed to delay for a time but now has sent this message. You will act accordingly."

Potter and I ran back to the division. In our absence the worst had happened. A sudden onslaught of the enemy under that magnificent leader, General Mahone, had driven our men back to the original Union front line. There was no need for further action. The hoped-for assault was out of the question. The mine explosion had failed of its mission. Someone had blundered.



## VI

It would be utterly ungenerous and unfair of me in narrating the events of July 30th., 1864, to dismiss the account of the fiasco, giving the impression that our failure to take Petersburg on that day was due alone to the muddling of Union orders, and the mishandling of our attacking divisions. It is also frightfully unfair to assume that all of the northern generals of those attacking divisions were in a safe place back of their troops. The bravest of the brave were men like General Bartlett of the first division, who made superhuman efforts to get his green troops into formation and out of the crater; who stayed in that inferno of shell fire and blistering heat until the final charge of the Confederates, who took him prisoner. Who else was there, impotently striving to save the day? Colonel Joshua K. Sigfried, whose patiently-trained negro troops, when their delayed opportunity came, led the charge I have referred to, and later stayed with his troops, trying to get them safely out of danger; Colonel H. G. Thomas, also commanding a brigade (the second) of the colored division. Of their division commander Ferraro, it is only possible to say that, according to the sworn statements of his own officers, they saw him most of the time in the bombproof with Ledlie and Wilcox. But there were plenty of really brave and heroic men in those mismanaged divisions; and no finger of scorn should be leveled at men who stood their ground in a rout.

But let me return to what is the object of this part of my narrative. Let me give credit to those who opposed our efforts; men who, by perfectly organized movements under personal, skilful direction of their superiors, made the power of one man superior to that of eight. There is a lesson to be drawn from the desperate courage of our honorable enemies; let us learn it. I will first quote Captain Richard C. Pegram, commanding officer of the battery which was blown to atoms by our mine.

War Talks Confed. Vets, page 208

"On the evening preceding the Crater explosion, and when I had begun to think that our countermine had probably secured us from all danger from any mine of the enemy, Lieut. Martin and I, who had been on duty in the trenches for two day and nights, were relieved by Lieuts, Hamlin and Chandler of my command, and I proceeded to my headquarters, near the residence of Mr. Wm. Cameron, at the head of Adams Street in the City of Petersburg, Va., where my presence was required in the supervision of the preparation of my muster roll.

"Upon being awakened by the explosion, I went down to our lines, and upon finding Major Coit, the commander of the battalion to which my command was attached, at Wright's battery, he ordered me to return to my headquarters, and to ascertain, as far as I could from such of my men as had escaped, the extent of my loss; and to get the third section of my battery, which had not been placed in the trenches, in readiness to move as soon as ordered. . . . My loss by the mine explosion was seventeen men and two officers killed, and three men captured."

This statement definitely fixes the number of the



men, approximately, who were manning the battery, for few escaped death or injury or capture. There were, in addition to this, a number of regiments, namely, the 17th., 18th., 22nd., 23rd., and 26th. South Carolinas of Elliott's Brigade supporting this battery. The 18th. and 22nd. were occupying the parapets of the fort. Of these regiments 262 were killed in the explosion.

Now let us see what opposition there was to the planned assault on Petersburg immediately following the explosion. I will quote from the Southern Historical Papers, Vol. V. page 247 from the pen of Capt. Henry G. Flanner, commanding Flanner's Battery:

"I claim that the battery commanded by me, and composed entirely of North Carolinians, is entitled to the credit of preventing the Federal Army from entering Petersburg on the morning of the springing of the mine. The facts are these: The mine was sprung about daylight . . . and was immediately followed by the capture and occupation of our line of breastworks by the enemy. They remained in the works until 8 o'clock before making preparations for the advance. About that time they reformed line of battle and began advancing towards the city. Flanner's battery was posted in the main road near the Gee house, about two hundred yards (actually over 500 yards) in the rear of the Confederate breastworks, immediately in the rear of the mine, forming what might be considered a second line, but entirely without infantry support. Immediately upon the advance of the enemy, we opened upon them with shell and cannister, and they soon sought shelter in their trenches. In a few minutes



they again re-formed and commenced advancing. Again we opened on them with our six guns. The enemy pressed steadily forward, when our guns were double charged with cannister, and deadly fire poured into their ranks. Their lines were then broken, and they fled to the works and there remained until our infantry composed of the brigades of Mahone, Girardey (Girardey commanded no brigade, but was on the staff of Mahone) and Saunders, all under the command of Mahone, arrived and were placed in position preparatory to making the final charge which resulted in the recapture of the works about two o'clock in the day. (Actually the hour was 1 P. M.)

"The fire of the enemy, from nearly one hundred guns, was concentrated upon my country for nearly two hours; but amid this terrible rain of deadly missiles, these brave North Carolinians stood to their guns and repulsed every advance made by the enemy; holding them in check alone, and without infantry support, until the arrival of Gen. Beauregard with the troops commanded by Mahone above mentioned.

"We claim the honor of saving the day, and preventing what might have been a very serious disaster, and probable loss of Petersburg."

Now let us have the words of one who was with the Confederate troops under General Elliott, the commanding officer of the salient fronted by the crater. I will quote Colonel F. W. McMaster, of Columbia, S. C., commanding the 17th. South Carolina regiment in a letter to Mr. George S. Barnard, of Petersburg, the editor of War Talks of Confederate Veterans:

“——In ten or fifteen minutes after the explosion, Gen. Elliott came along with Col. Smith of the 26th. South Carolina regiment, and ordered me to take my regiment and follow him and form a line on the brow of the hill and charge the enemy out of the Crater. Smith had a few of his men crammed in the ditch following him. I waited a few minutes until Smith and some of his men were out of the way, and extended the order of my line. I saw Elliott, Smith, and about a half dozen men get out of the ditch on the brow of the hill. Elliott was shot immediately after he got up.

“As soon as the general was shot, he was borne past me, and told me to take charge of the brigade. His aids reported to me immediately and rendered good service during the day. As soon as I took command I countermanded the order given by Gen. Elliott. It struck me as rashness to endeavor to make the men get out of the ditches and attempt to form a line under fire at the top of the hill at fifty or seventy-five yards from the Crater and the enemy's line, which was about one hundred yards east of the crater. To do this seemed an impossibility. I observed at this time that the Crater was full of men, and counted either fourteen or sixteen regimental flags, and I was then a rock's throw from them.

“My apprehension was that the men in the Crater would rush down the hill westwardly and get in rear of my line in the ravine in which Gen. Mahone subsequently formed his line. I ordered Col. Smith of the 26th. to take all of his men he could gather and immediately go down the ditch to Gen. Elliott's headquarters, to go up this ravine and lie down, and if



the enemy endeavored to rush down upon him to resist them. Smith's regiment being small, I detached three of my largest companies under Capt. Crawford, to co-operate with him, and my anxiety was very great until Smith's command got in position. Believing that the fate of Petersburg depended on filling up this gap in the rear of the Crater, I spread the remainder of the 17th. regiment, and the very small part of the 18th. that remained, along the line of the trenches until it struck Ransom's brigade on the left, and fought the enemy from behind the traverses as well as I could. At various places we threw up barricades across the trench. Many of the enemy jumped over the back part of the Crater, got into the rear ditch which communicated with the trench leading into Pegram's salient, and pressed me on my right flank. Nearly all of my two right companies were killed, wounded, and captured in the successive hand to hand fights we had here. Once, when my men retreated to the bend in the works next on their left, I was left between the enemy and my command.

"Being anxious about Smith and his men in the ravine to the west and rear of the Crater, I took a position back of a little mound close to a sink, from which position I made a reconnaissance of the ravine. On my return up the little ditch to the main trench, I observed the trench for twenty yards free of men. As soon as I got back to my men, we made a new barricade. I had before this time sent couriers to Gen. Bushrod Johnson, and one to the right wing of the brigade, which was on the south side of the Crater, informing them that I was in command, and directing them to resist the enemy as best they could



until the reinforcements which Gen. Johnson was sending up should arrive.

\* \* \*

"The 17th. S. C. Regiment *remained* in the trenches in their position to the left of the salient and *in immediate proximity to it* from the moment of the explosion until they were driven out by the assault of the Federal (negro) troops at about 8 o'clock. During all which time the 17th. S. C. *alone* barred the passage along the trenches toward the covered way in the direction of Cemetery Hill."

I give you this quotation which exactly corresponds with what I myself saw. The only Federal troops I saw make the charge toward Cemetery Hill was the negro brigade under Sigfried. I saw him wave his sabre and yell "Come on Bosby!" to Major O. C. Bosbyshell, his adjutant, just as he jumped over the parapet.

I now come to a first-hand account of the final stage of the battle of the Crater as told by the man who directed the magnificent counter attack against our forces—none other than General William Mahone. General Lee, hearing the news of the calamity, and the attack by the Union forces, sent word to General Mahone, then commanding Anderson's Division in front of the Union forces under Hancock, to send two of his brigades to aid General Bushrod Johnson in recapturing the works. General Mahone replied that, with General Lee's permission, he would bring the brigades himself. Withdrawing his troops so quietly that General Hancock continued for hours to advise Meade that not a rebel had left his front, Mahone reported to General Bushrod Johnson on the Jerusalem Plank Road with

the Virginia and Georgia Brigades. In the meantime General Robert E. Lee had arrived on the scene himself.

General Mahone, in his letter, says: "Moving quickly up the slope, I found myself in full view of the position of the salient which had been blown up, and of that part of the works to the north of the Federal soldiers and thickly studded with Federal flags.—At once I sent back to my line in the trenches, full two miles away, for the Alabama brigade to be brought me quickly by the route by which the two brigades had come, then indicating to Capt. Girardey the ground on which I desired the Virginia brigade formed facing the retrenched cavalier of the salient—

The Virginia brigade being now in position, and the head of the Georgia brigade having now left the mouth of the covered way and filing up the depression to take its place on the right of the Virginia brigade, the left of the Virginia brigade being not more than eighty feet from where I stood, and Girardey about midway, Girardey sang out 'General, they are coming!' Whereupon, turning my head to the left—at the moment I was instructing the Georgia brigade as it was filing along the depression—I saw the Federals jumping out of the Confederate breastworks and coming forward in a desultory line as if to charge us, and in a tone of voice so raised that the whole of the Virginia brigade might hear me, I said to Girardey, 'Tell Weisiger to forward'. Capt. Girardey, like the brilliant officer he was—never failing to do precisely the right thing at the right time—rushed with uplifted sword to the front of the brigade himself, repeated the command 'Forward' and led the brigade, which, as if on dress



parade, and with the steadiness and resolution of regulars—moved forward to meet the advancing enemy.”

The rest of the story of the hand to hand fighting has been told. Later, Sander’s Alabama brigade of but 800 men, charged the crater, and drove Wilcox out to the south of the crater. This enabled Sanders and his men to draw mortars so close to the pit that only two ounces of powder were required. Last of all, Sanders called for forty volunteers to seize the pit and end the battle. *Every man in the brigade volunteered.* At that minute the men in the pit surrendered.

I speak of the details of the Confederate movements for a particular purpose. Do you realize that the charge which General Mahone directed was led by a *captain*? Do you realize that those two brigades in that magnificent counter charge closed the gates of Petersburg to Union troops for ten months of bloody fighting and hardship unspeakable? Do you also realize that the whole of the Confederate movement of defense was under the personal observation of General R. E. Lee and Beauregard? Now ask where the commanding general of the Army of the Potomac was at this time. By his own sworn statement he had gone back to his own headquarters some three miles from the scene of battle. And the commanding general of the entire Union army was—somewhere on the road to City Point. Their orders to withdraw were “peremptory” to Burnside—*peremptory*—with that handful of Confederates the only obstacle in the way to Petersburg!

But the casualties of that battle covering two acres of ground were six thousand five hundred.



## VII

As I expected, our lines had no sooner settled down to the routine of siege duty following the terrible experiences of July 30th., than the whole camp became charged with the electricity of bitter recriminations. Ledlie, the commanding general of the first division, whose cowardice and misbehavior had been the cause of the failure of his division to go forward, disappeared from view, officially on sick leave. Wilcox and Ferraro still remained, but under a definite cloud. Potter came in for his share of criticism, but only as one of the division commanders of a corps that had failed of its mission. All knew that he had been on the front line, and had obeyed orders, so the stigma of cowardice was never attached to his name. But everyone knew that an investigation was pending that would be far reaching.

My own feelings are almost impossible to describe. I was perfectly clear of any blame in the matter. The mine was completed absolutely according to plan; and had been exploded within an hour of the appointed time. The delay had really been of advantage rather than otherwise. The effect of the explosion had exceeded my own expectations, for I had been doubtful as to whether or not the reduction in the charge would prevent the accomplishment of our purpose. It had actually blown the fort out of existence, and had opened exactly the path in the enemy lines that we had hoped and planned. But the whole project had melted to ashes, leaving me cold,

sick at heart, disillusioned, and resentful. Moreover, the intense strain of the past three months had told on me, and I was thin, irritable and almost sleepless. In one of the engagements early in the campaign, I had been struck on the leg by a piece of rock when a shell exploded near me. The bone had not been broken, but the bruise now gave me a good deal of pain. However, I was not incapacitated, and the war was still going on. If it had not been for the heartfelt and unanimous sympathy of those rough miners of my regiment, I think I would have given up. Everywhere I went I was congratulated by my friends; and I could not fail to observe the almost reverential respect that shone in the eyes of the enlisted men as I passed by. It touched me so deeply that I sometimes felt like bursting into tears. How I loved those boys. If only I could have led that charge with the Forty-eighth. GOD!—IF!

A day or two after the battle of the crater, I received a message to report to Major-General Burnside. Trouble had started, although not for me. Reluctantly I scribbled my initials on the message, returned it to the orderly and buckled on my side arms. I did not want to see Burnside nor anyone else. However, orders are orders.

The general was sitting alone in his tent, one elbow on a little field desk, with his hand supporting his head. I have never seen a more pathetic picture of remorse, despair, and yet fiery indignation on any face. He looked years older, and sick. He returned my salute, and straightened himself in his chair with an effort, his brusque, bluff manner returning at last.

"Colonel Pleasants," he said abruptly, "I have wanted to talk to you privately and personally. First



of all I want to congratulate you from the bottom of my heart for the perfect success of your project. That the result was not accomplished, was not in the slightest degree your fault. You did what you did in the face of skepticism and actual interference. The men higher up said it could not be done, and you did it. You have my sincere thanks, which will appear in orders; but I want to thank you personally. Take a seat, Colonel."

I bowed. There was nothing I could say. I sat down.

"Colonel Pleasants," Burnside leaned towards me, both elbows on his knees, his eyes glowing with emotion, "This matter is bound to be investigated. There was one horrible blunder after another, and I am held responsible".

I started to say something, but he waved me to silence.

"I know what you were about to say, that it was the cowardice of certain general officers. Very true; but let that pass, I was to blame for allowing them to draw lots. I was to blame for not having more specific battle orders drawn up. The fact that General Meade reversed my plans within thirteen hours of the appointed time of the explosion, and insisted that the colored troops be held in reserve has no bearing on the FACT, understand me, FACT, that I was in command of the Ninth Corps, and was the man responsible for the battle orders and their execution. I was to blame in ever having Ledlie commanding the first division. I was to blame for not getting order out of chaos".

Burnside sat back in his chair, and wiped the perspiration from his face. He sat for a moment



staring into space, apparently unaware of my presence. Never had I seen a more tragic figure.

"I sent for you, Colonel Pleasants," he went on in a quiet, flat voice, "because not only were you actually concerned in this frightful fiasco for which you were not even remotely responsible, but also because you have been for so many months one of my most dependable and trusted officers. The Ninth Corps has been my very life. When I was removed from the command of the Army of the Potomac and given command of the Army of the Ohio my one request of the President was that I might take the Ninth Corps with me. It was granted; and the way you boys conducted yourselves in provost-guard duty in Lexington and other towns was most gratifying. Your discipline, and tactful insistence upon law and order on the part of the civilians, and the prompt measures you took to prevent hostile demonstrations such as guerilla raids may have been the deciding factor in holding that section under Northern control. It was tedious and unromantic, I know, but it was superbly handled. Then there was the great struggle around Knoxville, beginning with the battles against fearful odds; the steady, orderly withdrawal to the city; the rapid construction of impregnable fortifications in record time; the siege and virtual starvation for weeks, and the final triumph in the raising of the siege when the Confederates fell back. Then there was the long winter in the mountains of East Tennessee, where the sufferings of our boys were not one bit less than those of Washington's men at Valley Forge. Can I ever forget the fact that the Ninth Corps boys re-enlisted in such unbelievable numbers when their sufferings

were greatest? You men and officers have been part of me, Colonel Pleasants; and I want you to know the truth about the commanding officer you have trusted. The crash is coming. I shall be disgraced. It is inevitable. But before it comes I want you to understand a few facts."

He laid upon the table a sheaf of dispatches, and began sorting them one by one. I could see that his hands were trembling and wet. Once more he wiped his face; then reached into a chest and produced a bottle of brandy and two glasses.

The fiery liquor steadied both of us. After the tension of the past few weeks I was almost hysterical with emotion as I listened to the poor old fellow. I think I would have burst into tears like a baby in another minute. We sat silent for some time.

"I shall not ask you to read all of those dispatches, Colonel Pleasants. Individually they are perfectly regular, and a court of inquiry can and will find nothing to take exception to. What the court will not realize is that those dispatches were showered down upon me at a time when I was beside myself with anxiety and responsibility. I had to answer each of them at times when minutes counted. Some of them are captioned 'Headquarters, Army of the Potomac', others 'Headquarters, Ninth Army Corps!' That is explained by the fact that I was up at Battery 14, and General Meade was at my own headquarters, and his Chief of Staff, General Humphreys, may have used sheets of my dispatch paper. Also, one dispatch is headed 'July 20' instead of 'July 30'. Those matters are inconsequential, but, if you will note the time of each dispatch you will see that I was simply deluged with them.



"This devilling kept up hour after hour during the hottest part of the battle", General Burnside's eyes flashed, "The climax came when General Meade wrote me: 'Do you mean to say your officers and men will not obey your orders to advance? I wish to know the truth, and desire an immediate answer'. Then I blew up. I wrote a letter that will cause trouble. I told General Meade that if it were not insubordinate, I should say that the remark was un-officer-like, and ungentlemanly. It was a foolish thing to do, of course, but—", General Burnside clenched his fists, "It was just what Meade was waiting for. HE HAD ME!

"As I said before, there is no need for you to more than glance over those dispatches. In fact, I think you might be spared the trouble. You already know that Meade gave me a peremptory order to withdraw early in the afternoon. It came just at the time when I really saw a glimmer of hope that we could organize our men and carry Cemetery Hill. He had tried to influence me to withdraw as early as 9.30 A.M. on July 30, and continued to do so at intervals without actually ordering it except once, and that time he countermanded the order. It is really not of any serious moment that you come here; but as originator of the whole project it seemed to me that you were entitled to know the actual facts and judge for yourself. Meade asked for a copy of my note to him. I know what that means, but I gave it to him. There will be an investigation, and Meade will also prefer charges, of course. You are out of the picture, Colonel Pleasants, but, naturally, you will be called upon to testify as to certain facts."

I had listened attentively while the general was



talking, turning over everything in my mind. Now I said:

"General Burnside, if I can be of help to you, I will be only too glad to appear at any investigation. I really cannot see where my testimony would do more than establish the facts concerning the mine and its explosion. I am really exhausted and sick, and had expected to apply for a short leave of absence to collect my senses and get some rest. Would you object seriously if I did so?"

"Not in the least, Colonel Pleasants," said Burnside, kindly, "I understand your feelings and will cheerfully endorse your application for leave to General Meade. In fact, just at this time it would be hardly necessary to bring into any proceedings the facts that you alone could present. Again I want to thank you for coming here, and for your loyalty and courage under my command. Good day, Colonel Pleasants."

That evening I wrote out my application for leave of absence and sent it forward. A day or two after that I received a message from General Humphreys, Chief of Staff of the Army of the Potomac directing me to report to General Meade. Why would they not let me alone? I had my horse brought to my tent, and started off.

General Meade's headquarters were about three miles south of the salient occupied by the Ninth Corps. Reaching there I dismounted, handed my reins to my orderly, and entered the big tent, in the fly of which a number of officers were lounging. A clerk rose from a table, as I paused uncertainly in the opening, and, on learning who I was, led me back through another opening in the rear into another

tent where General Meade was sitting at a field desk.

My sensations on being shown into the general's presence were rather peculiar, and somewhat interesting. The whole atmosphere of the place was impregnated with a strange miasma of cold formality and steel-like rigidity of precision. Everything was so neat and exact that one felt as if the very grass blades under his feet had been combed. General Meade rose deliberately from his chair and held out his hand after acknowledging my salute. I took it perfunctorily, and the feeling of the soft cold fingers reminded me in a vague way of ice caves in the bottom of a mine shaft. He towered above me, a great, bearded imposing figure of a man, faultlessly dressed, his high cavalry boots with extra tops brilliantly shined; his brass buttons and trappings dazzling bright. His eyes, deep set beneath a well moulded high forehead, met mine, and I studied them closely in that brief second. The lids were heavy, like those of a thinker, but in their gray depths I caught a quick flash of cunning; the cool calculating, self-seeking avariciousness of a clever aristocrat. Somehow it seemed to me that in that brief moment those eyes knew that I had sounded their depths, for they wavered, fell, and with a graceful wave of his hand General Meade motioned to me to be seated. His voice was low and suave.

"Colonel Pleasants, I wish first of all to congratulate you on the success of your project. The mine was entirely satisfactory from a military standpoint, and you deserve great credit. I have had orders published to that effect. If the attack following the explosion had not been so horribly bungled, the whole affair would have been a very considerable



victory. Will you have a glass of very fine Madeira, sir?" he reached towards a chest beside his desk.

"Thank you, no, General Meade," I said very quietly. I would as soon have drunk with Mephistopheles.

"Er—Colonel Pleasants, you have applied for a leave of absence, I believe, that has been endorsed by General Burnside."

"Yes, sir."

"Well,—er—There is an investigation pending, which, however, I think does not need your testimony. Your leave is granted, sir."

"Thank you, General Meade", I rose, saluted, and walked out of the tent.

A day or two later my leave of absence was granted, and I made my preparations to go by boat to Baltimore, en route to Philadelphia. I wanted to spend as much of the ten days granted me as possible at Rockland. I knew how anxious Uncle Henry and Aunt Emily had been concerning me, and really there was no place in the world that appealed to me so much as that hospitable old home. I would have planned to go to Lexington, if it had not been such a long and tiresome journey. Then, too, there were good reasons for my not going. My term of service in the army would not expire until the middle of December. If I survived that long, my next move would depend on circumstances, and I would be in a better position to talk things over quietly then with Anne. From her sweet and affectionate letters to me, I saw that she understood my attitude of mind perfectly. I did want to see that great wholesome, fun-loving, hearty girl very badly, however, and if



circumstances had been somewhat different, I would not have gone northward.

But it was not in the order of things that I should be allowed to go quietly on my leave of absence. The very day that it arrived, I received another order to report to General J. G. Barnard, Chief Engineer of the Armies of the United States. I could have disregarded it, for officially I was on leave of absence, but I did not wish to seem insubordinate. Besides that, I was just in the humor to tell somebody among those wiseacres just what I thought of the whole regular army crowd, and this was my opportunity. I pocketed my orders and leave of absence, and rode back to where General Barnard's tent was located. As I entered the General, a portly old fellow with bushy white whiskers, rose from his stool, and I saluted punctiliously. He bade me be seated. He then said in an unctious, patronizing way that made me see red: "Colonel Pleasants, what experience have you ever had, sir, as an engineer?"

I was so infernally mad at the old fool that I blurted out:

"Experience! I'm a better engineer than you've got in the Regular Army."

That got under his skin, all right. He rose to his feet, his face very red, and bowed in sarcasm. "I'm happy to know you! I'm happy to know you!" he sneered.

"Yes," I said, still boiling, "And I'll tell you why. An officer educated at West Point throws aside his theodolite when he leaves the academy, and scarcely has use for it afterwards, whilst I, sir, have to study that instrument daily in order to earn my bread and

butter. My own existence, and that of those dear to me, depends on my skill with the theodolite, whilst your regular's pay goes on, whether he ever sees the instrument or not."

The old fellow hemmed and hawed. He was mad, and so was I. He started to say something about preferring charges against me for addressing a superior officer so disrespectfully.

"Charges! Hell!" I snorted, "Try and do it. At the same time you do, suppose you answer the question as to why I had to send to Washington for a theodolite to survey the mine. Also answer the question why small sections of fuse were sent me. And also WHY my men had to use cracker boxes for hand barrows. Prefer your God-damned charges."

"Quietly, quietly, Colonel Pleasants," he said, worried now, "Of course I had no intention of preferring charges after your remarkable piece of work. Really, it was astounding. Nothing like it in military history. But don't get so excited, sir. What I really wanted to see you for was to ask you to go with me over the lines to point out suitable places for mining operations."

"General Barnard," I said slowly and deliberately, for my burst of temper had subsided, "I'll see you in hell, first. I am on leave of absence now". I tapped the papers in my pocket. "Good evening, sir". I saluted and left the tent.

My commission expired the following December. I could not bring myself to accept the promotions which were offered to me, for the bitterness and anguish that filled my heart made further military service unbearable. Of course I was forced to testify before the Committee of Congress, but the

results of its findings did not concern me personally. Poor old Burnside, as he had prophesied, was made to bear the brunt of the responsibility for the fiasco of the Battle of the Crater. My heart went out in pity towards the honest old warrior. What little comfort he may have obtained during those trying days must have been the thought that his beloved Ninth Corps was back of him to a man.

So ends my tale. The North and the South are re-united; and, after all, is not that the fulfilment of our dreams?



BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF  
BRIGADIER GENERAL  
HENRY PLEASANTS

ANCESTRY: General Pleasants was a direct descendant of John Pleasants, who came to Virginia as a Factor of a large mercantile company from Norwich, England in 1668, and who settled at Curles Neck, Henrico County, on the James River. John Pleasants and his wife were very prominent members of the Society of Friends; and, because of their failure to observe certain edicts of the Church of England, were fined. John Pleasants, feeling that the fine was unjust, appealed his case before Parliament, with the assistance of his friend John Randolph, and won, thereby, more toleration for Quakers in Virginia. Continuation of the line:

*John Pleasants II*, of Curles Neck, Planter.

*John Pleasants III*, of Curles Neck, Planter. Emancipated all of his slaves in his will. Founded mercantile house of John Pleasants & Sons (Tobacco).

*Samuel Pleasants*, of Curles Neck, Baltimore and Philadelphia. Became a prominent merchant in Philadelphia. Exiled from Philadelphia in 1777 with some 40 other members of the Society of Friends because of opposition to war. Was interceded for by General Washington, and all the "Exiles" returned to their homes.

*Israel Pleasants*, of Philadelphia, Merchant,

President of the United States Insurance Company. Later moved to Northumberland, Pa.

*John Pleasants*, son of Israel Pleasants and Ann Paschall Franklin, born in Philadelphia. Merchant. Associated with Hayes and Peacock in shipping arms and ammunition to Buenos Aires during the revolution there. Married Sylvia Naveis, the daughter of a Spanish nobleman. Died about 1843, leaving one son, born, February 16, 1833, whom he named for his brother Henry. Before his death, he had requested that the boy be brought up by this brother, Dr. Henry Pleasants, in Philadelphia.

EDUCATION: The little boy came from Buenos Aires alone by sailing vessel in 1846, and made his home with his uncle, who educated him at Central High School, Philadelphia, where he graduated in 1851.

ACTIVITIES: He began the practice of engineering in Pottsville, Pa., but was able to secure a position with the Pennsylvania Railroad, Western Division, in running the line from Greensburg to Pittsburg. Later, it is stated, that he was an assistant to the Chief Engineer of the Pittsburgh and Connellsville Railroad during the construction of the famous "Sand Patch Tunnel". In this railroad engineering work, he learned the essential elements of practical tunneling and ventilation of shafts that stood him in such good stead in later years. In 1857, he resigned, and returned to Pottsville, Pa., to engage in mining engineering in the Anthracite district. Here, he became associated with the Philadelphia and Reading Coal & Iron Co., and attained early distinction for his development of a new method of deep shaft mining.

MARRIAGE: In 1860, he married Sallie Bannon, daughter of the Editor of The Miners' Journal, of Pottsville. His wife died very suddenly within a few months of their marriage and the shock of her death nearly killed him, for the couple had been particularly devoted to each other. It is said that at the time of the outbreak of the war, in 1861, he was still so overcome with grief at the loss of his wife that his aunt, the wife of Dr. Pleasants, urged him to enlist in the army. He did so, but said in later years to his uncle, that he had recklessly exposed himself many times in action in the hope of being killed.

MILITARY RECORD: Enlisted as Second Lieutenant, "Tower Guards", of Pottsville, Pa. 1861 for three months service. Trained at Perryville, Maryland. Mustered out of service, and immediately re-enlisted in volunteers. Appointed Captain, Co. C., 48th. Pennsylvania Volunteers.

Actual engagements participated in by 48th. Reg. during his service with them:

Newbern, N. C., March 13, 1862

Second Bull Run, Aug. 29, 30, 1862

Chantilly, Va., Sept. 1, 1862

South Mountain, Md., Sept. 14, 1862

Antietam, Md., Sept. 17, 1862

Amisville, Va., Nov. 10, 1862

Frederickburg, Va., Dec. 13, 1862

Blue Springs, Tenn., Nov. 15, 1863

Campbell's Station, Tenn., Nov. 17, 1863

Wilderness, Va., May 6, 1864

Spottsylvania Court House, Va., May 10, 11, 12, 1864

North Anna River Crossing, Va., May 23, 1864

Armstrong Farm, Va., June 1, 1864



Shady Grove Church, Va., (Tolopotomy), June 3, 1864

Cold Harbor, Va., June 8, 9, 1864

Petersburg, Va. Attack, June 17, 1864

" " Mine operations, June 23,—  
July 30, 1864

Petersburg, Va. Battle of the Crater, July 30, 1864

Weldon Railroad, Aug. 19, 1864

Poplar Spring Church, Sept. 30, 1864

Hatcher's Run, Oct. 27, 1864

Fort Sedgwick, Nov. 27, 1864

Promoted from Captain to Lieutenant-Colonel, Sept. 20, 1862.

Appointed Provost Marshall General, 23rd Army Corps, Lexington, Kentucky, July 23, 1863. Relieved of this duty, by his own request Dec. 21, 1863, and with the following testimonial:

"The Brigadier General Commanding takes this occasion to testify to the able, prompt and satisfactory manner in which Col. Pleasants has discharged the duties of his staff Department, and parts with him with the greatest reluctance.

By command of

Brig. Gen'l. Manson,  
A. C. Kise, A.A.G."

Assumed command of the 48th. Reg. Pa. Vols. on the promotion of Colonel J. K. Sigfried to Brigade Commander, about May 1, 1864. Appointed commanding officer 1st. Brigade, 2nd. Div. 9th. Army Corps, June 17, 1864. Commissioned Colonel of Volunteers Oct. 6, 1864. Received appointment by the President of Brevet-Colonel of Volunteers, for distinguished services, which he declined. Honor-

ably mustered out of service on Dec. 19, 1864. Commissioned by President Andrew Johnson Brevet Brigadier General, "For skilful and distinguished services during the war, and particularly in the construction and explosion of the mine before Petersburg".

SUBSEQUENT CAREER: Returned to Pottsville, Pa. Jan. 2, 1865. Married Ann Shaw, of Lexington, Kentucky, 1867 (deceased). Children, Emma Pleasants Devlin, 2006 California St., San Francisco, Cal. (Living) 1937. John, (same address), living. 1937. James, (Deceased). Chief Engineer Philadelphia & Reading Coal & Iron Co, 1870. General Superintendent of Mining Police of Coal Regions, 1873. Took an active part with Detective McParlan, Pres. James Gowen and Captain Heisler in the apprehension of the leaders of the infamous "Mollie Maguires", that had terrorized the coal regions. He died March 26, 1880 of a brain tumor.





